

# Towards commitment or resistance

- understanding change communication  
practices in a culture change process

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*To my family and all of you out there who never stopped believing I could  
do this...*

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# Abstract

This thesis deals with two of the most central issues in our contemporary society, namely change and communication. It is empirically based on a case study of a change process following a major corporate merger and acquisition (M&A). When reviewing the literature on M&As in general, and change communication specifically, it became clear that there was a need for both process-oriented longitudinal studies and studies that recognized the everyday practices and the roles of employees' attitudes toward change. Based on this, the principal purpose of this thesis was to examine the communication practices that are used in culture change processes and especially in post-M&A culture change processes.

This thesis is based on the theories on organisational communication, change communication, strategic communication, and rhetoric. The ontological framework consists of a critical realism approach, and the empirical study was carried out in a newly merged organisation called Company X. The unit of analysis was the so-called Corporate Culture (CC) project through which Company X attempted to unify a company that had undergone a major acquisitions process during the end of the 1990s. The case study, which was process oriented, was carried out during the years 2001 to 2004 and, therefore, took on a longitudinal dimension. The empirical material was collected through three separate sub-studies: a document compilation, an interview study, and a questionnaire. The first sub-study used rhetoric analysis, the second sub-study used a qualitative analysis, and the third sub-study used a semi-qualitative analysis as method of analysis.

In the analysis, the findings of the three sub-studies are discussed in relation to the following three aspects of understanding culture change processes and change communication practices deduced from theory and aligned with the purpose of this thesis: (A) *the role of culture*, (B) *top management's use of change communication methods*, and (C) *employee perception and understanding of change processes* in the culture change process. The analysis indicates that both the top and middle management and the employees of Company X had a tool perspective on communication. This led to a top-down approach to the change communication among management and an acceptance of the top-down approach among employees. The analysis further suggests that a main driver toward a positive outcome of a culture change process is the employees' commitment or resistance to change. Whether employees embrace commitment or resist change is strongly influenced by the organisation's stabilisation of meaning, for example, its

code of conduct, the strategies it employs in communicating change, and how well it takes into account human practices.

This thesis makes three distinct contributions to the field of organisational communication research. First, it contributes by taking a communication perspective in understanding the change process as well as providing insight into the employees' attitudes toward organisational change. Second, it contributes by analysing change and change communication practices through a longitudinal approach, which is lacking in previous research. Third, it contributes with an increased understanding of which change communication methods should be used by change agents wishing to take a process-oriented approach to change.



# Sammanfattning

Denna avhandling behandlar två av de mest centrala frågorna i vårt moderna samhälle - nämligen förändring och kommunikation. Empiriskt är den baserad på en fallstudie av en förändringsprocess i ett företag som genomfört omfattande företagsförvärv. Vid granskning av litteraturen om sammanslagningar och företagsförvärv i allmänhet, och förändringskommunikation i synnerhet, framkom det att det fanns ett behov av både processorienterade longitudinella studier, och studier som analyserar den roll de anställdas attityder har gentemot förändring, samt de anställdas vardagliga praktik. Med utgångspunkt från ovanstående var därför det huvudsakliga syftet med uppsatsen att undersöka kommunikationspraxis som används i kulturella förändringsprocesser, och i synnerhet kulturella förändringsprocesser i efterdyningarna av ett antal företagsförvärv.

Teoretiskt tar avhandlingen sin utgångspunkt i teorier om organisationskommunikation, förändringskommunikation, strategisk kommunikation och retorik. Det ontologiska ramverket består av ett kritisk realistiskt förhållningssätt och den empiriska studien genomfördes i den nyligen sammanslagna organisation som heter Företag X. Målet för analysen var Corporate Culture (CC)-projektet, genom vilket Företag X försökte förena sitt företag, som under ett antal år genomförde ett antal företagsförvärv. Fallstudien, som var processorienterad, genomfördes under åren 2001 till 2004, och är därmed longitudinell i sin ansats. Det empiriska materialet samlades in i tre separata delstudier, en dokumentsammanställning, en intervjustudie och en enkät. Analysmetoden för den första delstudien var en retorikanalys, för den andra delstudien en kvalitativ analys och för den tredje delstudien en semi-kvalitativ analys.

I analysen diskuteras resultaten av de tre delstudierna i relation till tre aspekter, härledda från teorin, som är centrala för hur man kan förstå kulturella förändringsprocesser och praxis för förändringskommunikation. De tre aspekterna är också i linje med studiens syfte. Dessa är (A) kulturens betydelse, (B) ledningens användning av metoder för förändringskommunikation, och (C) de anställdas uppfattning om och förståelse av förändringsprocessen i Företag X kulturella förändringsprocess. Analysen visar att högsta ledningen, mellanchefer och anställda i Företag X hade ett verktygs-perspektiv på förändringskommunikationen, vilket ledde till en uppifrån-och-ner strategi för förändringskommunikationen och ett accepterande av uppifrån-och-ner strategin bland medarbetarna. Analysen visar vidare att en viktig drivkraft i en kulturell förändringsprocess, för att nå ett positivt resultat, är de anställdas engagemang för eller motstånd mot

förändringar. Åtgärder som leder till medarbetarnas engagemang för eller motstånd mot förändring, nås genom organisationens 'stabilisation of meaning', vilken kan erhållas genom till exempel uppförandekod, organisatoriska strategier som rör förändringskommunikation och de anställdas rutiner.

Avhandlingen lämnar tre olika bidrag. För det första bidrar den med ett kommunikationsperspektiv på förändringsprocessen samtidigt som den ger inblick i de anställdas attityder gentemot organisatoriska förändringar. Vidare bidrar den med att analysera förändringar och förändringskommunikationsmetoder via en longitudinell ansats, ett bristområde i tidigare forskning. Det tredje och sista bidraget är en ökad förståelse för vilka förändringskommunikationsmetoder förändringsledare med ett processorienterat synsätt kan använda sig av.

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Change in organisations, a complex story

In today's global economy, merger and acquisition (M&A) has become a central issue for most businesses. M&A can be defined as consolidation of two or more companies from which a new company is formed. Various reasons exist for a company to pursue an M&A. One reason might be synergistic effects leading to financial competitiveness and another might be a need to enter new geographical markets without having to create a new sales organisation. In general, the main objective of an M&A is most often related to cost reduction and/or increasing sales (Lewis, 2000; Balogun, 2001). When the contractual aspects of an M&A have been carried out, the so called post-M&A period begins, which often includes working with integration and the subsequent reorganisation of the entities involved in the M&A.

Integration and reorganisation during an M&A always involve some kinds of change processes. These change processes are often influenced by conditions in the environment such as changes in competitors' sales approaches, new business laws, or regulatory standards. They can also be triggered by needs within the organisation such as integration of ICT-systems (Information and communication technology), administrative routines, restructuring of personnel, and changes in work procedures (Johansson & Heide, 2008). Many of these changes are seen by the employees as being justified, but it is sometimes felt that a newly appointed leader's changes and the changes that occur during post-M&A periods are merely change the sake of change (Zorn et al, 2000).

The process of change is a rather complex story and is considered one of the most significant but unsettling workplace events because the outcome often fails to meet anticipated objectives (Zorn et al, 2000; Pepper & Larson, 2006). Julia Balogun (2001) and Gerald Pepper and Greger Larson (2006), for example, claim that post-M&A failures are commonly related to human relations and interactions and not to technical issues or administrative routines. Travis Russ (2008:199) further argues that "*organizations do not change through automation. Rather, change is implemented and sustained through human communication*".

Previous studies have reported that in most cases when organisational change is about to start it involves a change in the organisational culture(s) as well. Corporate culture(s) has an impact on many of a company's activities, including daily management, communications, relations between

employees, and relations between employees and customers (Schein, 1985). It also influences how knowledge is created, shared, and used within the organisation (Schein, 1985). A culture change manifests itself in the attitudes and behaviours of the organisational members, or as Henry Lane et al (2000:2) phrase it *“the meaning of the behaviours and how business is conducted differ dramatically from one culture to another”*. Lane et al (ibid) further argues that *“these differences may not be important on the surface or in a quick interaction, but they deeply affect commitments, relationships, cooperative decision making and other critical elements of social interactions.”*

A common argument made in the literature published on organisational culture change in the post-M&A period is that an organisation consists of, or should consist of, only one organisational culture in order to reach its full potential (Hofstede, 1997; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1998, 2000). Managers, some organisational scholars, and most practitioners claim that one organisational culture can be achieved via strong leadership and top-down implementation of the same values within the entire organisation. A common struggle for many large multinational companies in dealing with some of the negative consequences of an M&A is trying to create a sense of unity (Schein, 1985; Weber, 1996) and identification among individual parts of the company operating in different countries and with their own unique corporate cultures (Schein, 1985; Lane et al, 2000). According to Yaakov Weber (1996) and Mats Alvesson and Stanley Deetz (2000), a significant problem with international company acquisitions is the difficulty in getting several different independent organisations to work as a united company toward the same vision. In her study of Finnish corporate acquisitions from 2001 to 2004, Riika Sarala (2010) describes the reactions of the members of an acquiring company when they felt that their values, structures, and social identity were threatened by the acquired organisations. If the acquirer insists on preserving its own culture, this can negatively affect the building of a new organisational culture (Larsson & Lubatkin, 2000; Pepper & Larson, 2006). Sarala's (2010) results indicate that conflicts increase with organisational cultural differences and that employees' often respond to an M&A by attempting to preserve their own well-known organisational culture and by resisting attempts to build a unified culture.

## **1.2 Organisational change and communication**

In recent years, there has been an increasing number of studies on post-M&A change processes in general and on organisational culture change specifically. It is important to note that in this study I consider culture change processes to be part of the post-M&A period. In studies on post-M&A culture change processes, communication has been shown to be one of the

most central aspects both from a theoretical as well as a managerial perspective (Lewis, 2000; Johansson & Heide, 2008). From a theoretical perspective, Edward Hall (1959:186) argues that “*culture is communication and communication is culture*,” or more specifically, “...*communication constitutes the core of culture*...” (Hall, 1966:1). Katherine Miller (2006) highlights the role of communication in organisations, and states that an organisation would not exist without communication. Eric Eisenberg and Patricia Riley (1988:17) summarize this by saying that “*communication [in organisations – my comment] is the key process through which the cultural nexus is performed*.”

Following the line of reasoning above, because an organisational change process mostly entails changes in the organisational culture, and because communication is the way cultures manifest themselves, it can be concluded that an organisational change is dependent on functional communication. Laurie Lewis (2000) reasons that the outcome achieved in carrying out an organisational change process depends on the interactions of the change agents, those in charge of the execution of the change, as well as other stakeholders involved in the change process. The key issues for change agents, such as managers, in leading such processes are the communication practices associated with the changes and the attainment of commitment from their employees. An empirical study by Catrin Johansson (2003) found that a new style of management during organisational change processes involved the formulation of visions and values. These visions and values are communicated within the organisations with the expectation among management that a common understanding among employees would create a common organisational culture. This, Linda Smircich (1983) observes, leads management to anticipate a more efficient organisation that would help to steer the company in the right direction and toward higher profitability.

In an extensive literature overview on previous research dealing with communication in organisational changes, Johansson and Mats Heide (2008) found that communication, or, more specifically, the role of communication, can be seen in three different ways in the organisational change processes. One way of viewing the role of communication in the change process is as a tool to reach a particular goal, implying a transmission view of communication. Another way of seeing the role of communication is as the process itself meaning that communication can be seen as the motivator and the motor through which change comes about. The third view, which was less common than the first two, sees the role of communication as a form of social change implying that communication itself is the change, see also Jennifer Frahm and Kerry Brown (2005) and Johansson (2011).

Change communication methods with a tool perspective, such as the use of persuasion, have been studied by Charlotte Simonsson (2002), Johansson (2003, 2007), and Kirk Hallahan et al (2007). These authors claim that most managers take a transmission view on communication and, therefore, often experience problems when they try to communicate visions and goals. When the message they think they have communicated does not have the anticipated result, Simonsson (2002) asserts that managers often keep repeating simple messages such as pep talks and encouraging slogans about the expected outcome of the change process. The change communication practices that take either a process perspective or a social change perspective are seldom described in research studies. A critique against these perspectives is a lack of concrete methods and advice on how practitioners can use communication during the change process (Johansson & Heide, 2008).

Communication and change communication practices during culture change processes are an important and relevant topic to study. Based on this, one might ask how change communication practices are used in culture change processes and especially in post-M&A culture change processes?

Research studies on the role of change communication practices in post M&A culture change processes are scarce (Lewis, 2007). Few studies to date have studied the change communication dimensions in the change process in a single context and even fewer on a general level (Lewis, 2007). The studies that have been performed have focused on single variables and their effects on the change process, including resistance to change, management's and change agents' trustworthiness, and the role of underlying values and ideologies (Lewis, 2007). Adrianna Kezar (2001) also argues that the research on change communication practices has mainly focused on planned change and usually describes only a single approach in facilitating change and the role of change agents in the change process. Achilles Armenakis and Arthur Bedian (1999) state that change research during the 1990s focused on the implementation phases in a change process and on understanding the change process. These studies have all contributed in different ways with important knowledge and insights into the change process and, in some cases, into the change communication process.

Based on the previous research on change communication practices, some gaps in the existing research have been identified regarding the post-M&A period concerning the perspective taken and the types of studies undertaken.

Regarding the perspective taken, Russ (2008) argues that there is a lack of research that takes a communication perspective in understanding a change

process and Myungweon Choi (2011) claims that more studies need to be conducted to determine the role of employees' attitudes toward organisational change. Regarding the types of studies undertaken, Karen Whelan-Berry and Karen Somerville (2010) claim that the empirical point of view is underrepresented and Armenakis and Bedeian, (1999) and Eric Lofquist (2011) state that there is a need to study organisational change longitudinally and, if possible, in a live setting. Finally, Susan Cartwright and Richard Schoenberg (2006) conclude that significant advances in the understanding of M&A processes have been achieved over the 30 years that M&A research has been on-going but that more research on the process and organisational dimensions of acquisitions is needed.

Based on this background and the identified gaps in previous research, this thesis takes on a process perspective of change communication and its purpose is to describe and analyse both the top management's use of, and the employees' perception and understanding of, change communication practices in a culture change process during a major M&A. Because organisational change processes always involve changes in the organisational culture(s), and because communication is the way that cultures manifest themselves, I consider change communication practices to be equal to culture change practices for the purpose of this thesis.

The study focuses empirically on one specific culture change process, namely the top management's attempt to create a unified company from a major M&A undertaken in the early 2000s. The company studied is Company X, which decided to introduce common visions and values into an organisation that had grown rapidly over the five years around the new millennium via acquisitions of four large companies that nearly doubled the number of employees. The top management initiated a Corporate Culture (CC) project in which the "*...aim is to become one company, one Company X*" (Internal bulletin, 2001). Company X's reason for wanting to introduce common values was to unite a complex organisation with many different cultures. Their chosen approach was to introduce common values and to try to make all employees feel that they belonged to Company X and not to their old companies.

### **1.3 Purpose and research questions**

The overall intention with this study is to contribute to the organisational communication research field by analysing communication and organisational culture during situations of change. The purpose is to describe and analyse both the top management's use and the employees' perception and understanding of change communication practices in a

culture change process during a major M&A. From an organisational communication perspective, this thesis will explore how a company, during a major culture change process, uses change communication practices when trying to achieve a unified company and will take a longitudinal perspective as to how this change process is perceived and understood within the organisation.

The first research question concerns the communication strategies many companies use when they are involved in a process of planned organisational change (Weber, 1996; Alvesson et al, 2000; Sarala 2010). According to Lewis (2007), Russ (2008), and Lofqvist (2011), empirical studies of communication in multinational organisations going through change are scarce. By following Company X throughout the introduction process, this study attempts to reveal the aspects that contribute to and/or obstruct the success of the CC-project. In this context, it is of interest to explore which change communication strategies were used in the planning of the change process of introducing common vision and values in Company X.

The second research question concerns the change communication methods used in the planned organisational culture change. This is of interest because Armenakis and Bedeian (1999), Russ (2008), and Lofqvist, (2011) all have called for more studies on the change initiative efforts that are used during a change process and the lasting effects of these methods in an organisation. If possible, these researchers suggest that such studies should be carried out in a live setting. The study of the how as well as the what in the processes of planned organisational culture change within the context of a multinational organisation is important because very little prior research has addressed these issues. From a methodological standpoint, therefore, it is important to ask what kinds of strategic communication and rhetoric were used throughout the culture change process.

Finally, the third research question addresses the employees and their perception and understanding of the culture change process. This question is important because it is of interest to study the employees' potential change in their understanding of the culture change process over time. Armenakis and Stanley Harris (2009), Stephen Jaros (2010), and Choi (2011) claim that studies of the effects of employees' attitudes toward organisational change are rare, and in this thesis the employees' views are noted in a two-step analysis of the culture change process during the integration phase and two years after the change process. Thus this thesis ask how the employees perceived the change process during the introduction phase and ask about the employees' understanding of the results of the CC-project two years later.



The first research question regarding the change communication strategies addresses the planning phase of the change process. The second research question, what kind of change communication methods were used, covers the time period of the change process over the course of the entire CC-project. The third research question regarding the employees' perception and understanding of the change process covers the time period during which the CC-project was being introduced and a period of time two years after the completion of the CC-project. The three questions together reflect the development of the project over time and provide a longitudinal understanding of the change process.

#### **1.4 Disposition**

The background for the study is provided in Chapter 1. Chapter 2 describes the ontological and epistemological basis of the study. In Chapter 3, the most important theories and schools of thought are discussed in relation to the purpose and research questions of this study. Chapter 4 describes the company where the study took place and describes the CC-project that was the target of the thesis. Chapter 5 describes the methodology and research material used in the data collection and analysis. Chapters 6, 7, and 8 form the empirical part of this study, which is presented as three substudies. The concluding discussion is found in Chapter 9. Finally, suggestions for the utilization of the research results are provided in Chapter 10.

## **2 Ontological and epistemological basis**

### **2.1 Prologue**

Having worked in the business for many years, my background as a technician is coloured by a very technical environment in which a positivistic and modernistic approach is the norm. Being a technician, the positivistic view on science felt the most comfortable and my first thought when starting this study was to show the organisation the truth, what my problem really looks like from all different points of view without revealing my own ideas. During the process of reading and analysing the data, however, I realized that my position and earlier experiences in the communication department in my former company's headquarters as well as my current research studies have played and play a role in how I have conducted this study and interpreted its results. This will be more thoroughly discussed in the methodological chapter. In this chapter, I will describe the ontological and epistemological basis of my study.

### **2.2 Critical realism**

This study takes its theoretical point of departure within critical realism. According to the critical realism theory, there is a real reality that is independent of the subjective and exists autonomously of humans and a subjective reality that is experienced through subjective properties and is constructed from humans' social and historical backgrounds. In critical realism, reality is not only what we can observe but it is also an unobservable reality that contains events that are generated through the interactions among objects, agencies and structures. The positivistic view, on the other hand, can only analyse and describe the reality that we can observe. Roy Bhaskar et al (1998:23) phrased it in this manner "*...that scientific reality is not just constant conjunctions of observable events but about objects, entities and structures that exist (even though perhaps unobservable) and generate the events that we observe*". However, critical realism also emphasizes the importance of a subjective experience and view when describing reality. Norman Fairclough (2005:922) distinguishes between ontology and epistemology in the critical realism view and says, "*...we must avoid the 'epistemic fallacy' of confusing the nature of reality with our knowledge of reality*".

The "father" of critical realism, the philosopher Roy Bhaskar (1998), defines three stratified ontological domains of reality: the real, the actual, and the empirical (Figure 1) where objects, agencies, events, and structures exist in all three different realities and thus have different properties depending on

which domain they are affiliated with (Bhaskar, 1998; Danemark et al, 2003; Fairclough, 2005).

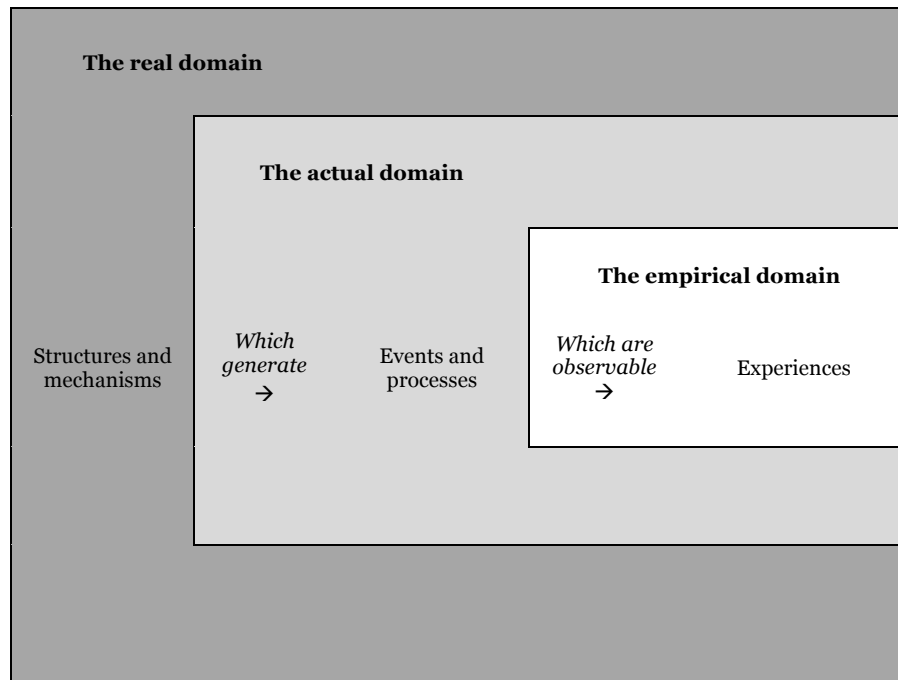


Figure 1. My interpretation of Bhaskar's (1998) three stratified ontological domains of reality: the real, the actual, and the empirical

The real domain, reality as such, contains structures and mechanisms (the causal power or properties of agency and/or objects) that are able to generate events and processes that occur in the actual domain. The actual domain is the domain of events and processes where some parts of these events and processes are unobservable and remain positioned in the actual domain while some parts are observable and are positioned within the empirical domain. Finally, the only domain that is observable (and thus a part of the real and actual domains) is the empirical domain that is directly connected to that which is observed and experienced by human agency (Danemark et al, 2003; Fairclough, 2005).

Bhaskar (1998, 2005) struggled, as have I, with the positivistic view of scientific research where only two sources of knowledge exist: what we can perceive through our senses and what we can deduce through logic. The observations, what we get via our senses, create our empirical knowledge, and it is through our observations that we acquire knowledge, the objective reality. Bhaskar (1998), however, questioned this and argued that reality is

as much a construction based on historical and social experiences. Berth Danemark et al (2003:21) state that the fundamental question in critical realism is whether there is “*a reality independent of our experiences*” and they answer this question, from a critical realism point of view, by saying that there is. When we perform analyses from a critical realism perspective, we seek the structures and mechanisms from the real domain that generated the event that we observed. This means that we strive to reach beyond the borders of the empirical domain and try to understand the scope of the actual and real domains. We can compare this with a positivistic analysis approach where the aim is to find an answer or reality that is possible to verify or falsify (Danemark, 2003; Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2008).

In accordance with the theories of critical realism and Alvesson’s and Kaj Sköldbberg’s (2008) description, my opinion is that a reality exists independently from us, this is the intransitive dimension, or the real object, as well as a reality determined through our historical and social knowledge, this is the transitive dimension or an object based on knowledge. In this arrangement, the concept of critical realism stresses the difference between reality as such and our notion about it.

Something I support concerning critical realism, as both Bhaskar (1998) and Danemark et al (2003) describe it, is that critical realism acknowledges a generalizing claim on scientific studies. However, when discussing generalizing within critical realism two different types of generalizing are referred too. The first one, scientific generalizing, is based on a constant conjunction of events and is very much connected to the positivistic view. It is grounded on a selected group of observations, statistically proven by the researcher, from which it is possible to draw a conclusion covering a larger group of samples. The second type of generalizing, realistic generalizing, focuses on the causal mechanisms and structures that are involved when a view of a concrete object or event is constructed, just like in the real domain. It is through abstract thinking and reconstruction of the actual observation (the empirical domain) that one argues for the generalization of *retroduction*. According to Andrew Sayer (1992:107), retroduction is a “...mode of inference in which events are explained by postulating (and identifying) mechanisms which are capable of producing them...”. In this definition, scientific generalizing is used to *predict* what is to come based on an observation, and the deduction of a prediction results in an answer. Realistic generalizing, however, is about *explaining* what is to come based on an observation, and a hypothetical mechanism is proposed that, if it existed, would generate an event.

Some important concepts used in critical realism are worth explaining in connection to the social sciences in general and to my study specifically, including structure, mechanisms, agency, and causal powers.

- A structure is a recurrent pattern and refers to a set of agencies or objects with different access to resources regulated according to the structure or, as Danemark (2003:121) refers to it, “*as a set of internally related objects*”.
- Mechanisms are the causal power or properties of agencies and/or objects that generate the events and processes present in the actual domain and that can be empirically observed in the empirical domain.
- *Agency* is the capacity of an agent (an individual or other entity) to act independently and to make his or her own free choices and potentially cause an event within a structure.
- The agency can have a set of causal powers, which according to Sayer (1992:85) are “... *generative in behaviour*” by virtue of their physical make up, socialization, and education.

Structures, according to critical realism, are a pre-requisite for any intentional event and must, therefore, exist before the event takes place. Jesper Austrup (2000:4) says, “...*actors can never create social structures, but rather through their actions they reproduce or transform them*” and Danemark (2003) argues that structures are the internal or necessary relations between objects that determine the nature of social phenomena, whereas external or contingent relations determine whether its causal powers will be activated and with what effects.

To conclude, a researcher who takes a critical realism perspective views society as being formed by an agency that is rationally and independently following the opportunities that the structure presents and views individuals as socially constructed into particular modes of behaviour that subsequently define the social structure.

### **2.3 Critical realism, organisational communication, and culture change processes**

A critical realist perspective discards the view that reality is considered as existing only if it is measurable, nor does it advocate a reality that is constructed and created only through discourses. In other words, a discourse

can change over time, but the reality it addresses, the real and actual domains, largely remains the same.

If one connects critical realism to organisational communication and culture, this would imply that organisational communication and culture exist independently whether we observe them or not. At the same time, however, the definitions of communication and culture depend on the meanings that different agency involved in creating the culture give them. If the word 'society' in the quotation below, is replaced with the word 'culture', then Bhaskar (2005:39) summarises the critical realism view of culture in the following two paragraphs:

*"People do not create society [culture]. For it always pre-exists them and is a necessary condition for their activity. Rather, society [culture] must be regarded as an ensemble of structures, practices and conventions which individuals reproduce or transform, but which would not exist unless they did so. Society [culture] does not exist independently of human activity (the error of reification). But it is not the product of it (the error of voluntarism) //...// Society [culture], then, provides necessary conditions for intentional human action, and intentional human action is a necessary condition for it. Society [culture] is only present in human action, but human action always expresses and utilizes some or other social form. Neither can, however, be identified with, reduced to, explained in terms of, or reconstructed from the other."*

Another way of putting this is to acknowledge that knowledge of the world (or in my case culture and the objective and causal mechanisms that create culture) exists and that the social (or in my case organisational) structures influence the human agency/individual behaviour. The beliefs, understandings, and meanings of humans do matter, not because they define what objective reality is but rather because they are likely to influence behaviour. Critical realism views behaviour as being influenced by both agency and structural factors. Although humans have a degree of agency, it is always controlled by wider structural factors that are viewed as surrounding the individual. Even though culture can be regarded as being reliant on and created only through the existence of humans and their connection to objective and casual mechanisms, critical realism claims that culture exists even without individuals. Culture, though, consists of the structures and mechanisms of objects and their 'causal powers' but is dependent on the human agencies/individuals (and their communicative ability) to reproduce and transform it (Mingers & Willcocks 2004).

When culture is reproduced and transformed, some kind of change will occur and Fairclough (2005:918) argues that *"with respect to organizational*

change, both organizational structures and the agency of members of organization in organizational action and communication have causal effects on how organizations change”. Because of the stratified view on reality in critical realism and its focus on how intransitive structure and mechanisms might or might not generate events affecting human agency, critical realism is considered well suited for studies of processes and networks. Annmarie Ryan et al (2012) argue that critical realism is well suited to address the central question of structural change in industrial relationships and networks due to the view of change as being dynamic and based on continuous human agency.

Through his work on change in networks, Aastrup (2000) has adopted the view of critical realism and illustrated a framework (Figure 2) that connects the different definitions used by critical realism. Aastrup (2000:14) summarizes the framework by saying that *“change in networks according to the critical realist position should be viewed as processes transforming or reproducing the network structures. This is the case dealing with radical change, continuous change as well as stability. All kinds of change (or stability) should be accounted for, and should be viewed as ontologically similar”*. Instead of change in networks I will use the framework as a way of illustrating culture change processes, thus aiding me in my study.

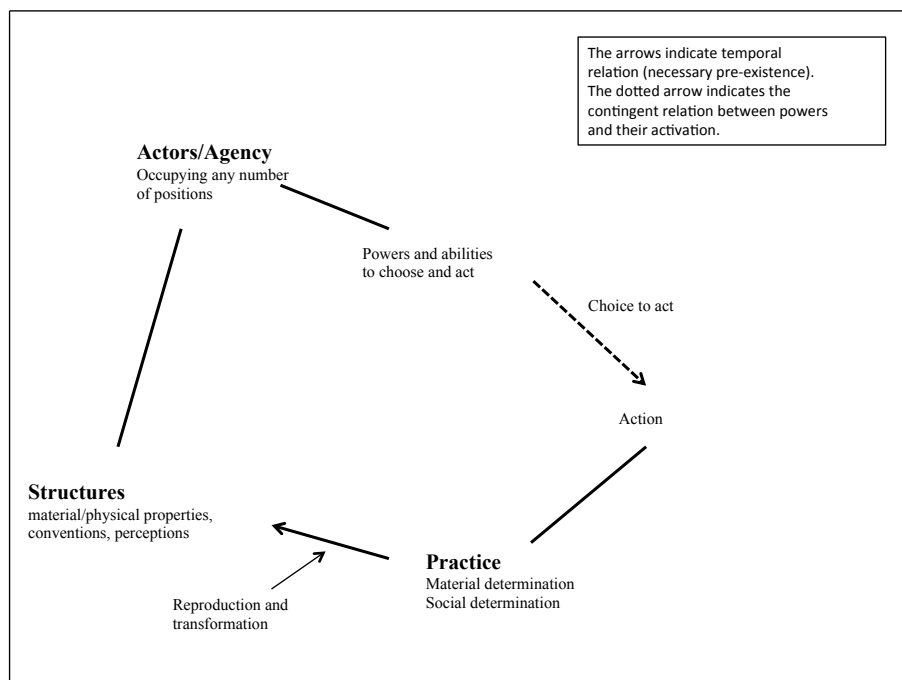


Figure 2. A critical realist framework adopted from Aastrup (2000)

As illustrated in Figure 2, Aastrup (2000) sees the change process as an on-going process that is dependent on human agencies, practices, and structures in equal measure. The human agencies can occupy different types of position in an organisation and thus have different powers and abilities to create action. The human agencies also have the power to choose to act or not. The type and impact of the action by the human agencies is determined by the material and social practices connecting the human agencies. These material and social practices are dependent on the surrounding structure, meaning the causal mechanisms as material and physical properties, conventions, perceptions etc., and is reproduced or transformed according to human agency actions. Another way of defining this process is Fairclough's (2005:923) who defines critical realism as *"explaining social processes and events in terms of the casual powers of both structures and human agency and the contingency of their effects"*.

It is important within this framework to bring the three realities into the picture, but this becomes an extremely complex task. I will not, therefore, try to cover all realities nor all factors involved in change, but will use this framework as a guide in my analysis of a culture change process in a major international M&A. With critical realism as an ontological framework and Aastrup's (2000) model guiding me in my analysis of the culture change process, I will not only try to describe what kind of change process I observed through the empirical reality but will also try to explain the realities that were not visible by identifying the role that structural factors play (the culture(s) of the organisation I studied) in human agency (the employees and top and middle management in the organisation I studied) and in generating practices (the events and processes within the boundaries of the organisation I studied).



### **3 Theoretical framework and previous research**

In this chapter I will present the theoretical framework that has inspired me throughout the study. As my point of departure, I will look at recent studies on post-M&A cultural change processes that have shown the indispensable value of communication (Lewis, 2007; Johansson, 2007; Lofqvist, 2011). Because the purpose of this study lies within the area of organisational communication, the main focus of this chapter is on organisational communication and the sub-areas of change communication and organisational culture.

#### **3.1 Communication and organisations**

Organisational communication is a combination of two central concepts, communication and organisation. Before I describe the theoretical field of organisational communication, I will give a brief description of the two concepts separately.

##### **3.1.1 Communication**

There are many reasons to discuss the concept of communication in this study, one being that communication, as Lewis (2007) and Johansson (2007) acknowledge, is a very important part of a cultural change process. Therefore, it is one of the most important concepts of my analysis. Secondly, communication in business organisations is often dominated by an old and elementary view on communication (Heide & Simonsson, 2002), and because my study was carried out in a business environment, I find it important to clarify my viewpoint.

An early communication model is the Claude Shannon and Warren Weaver's transmission view model on communication (1949) that consists of a linear communication consisting of sender, message, channel, and receiver. This model has been altered several times over the years, adding feed-back and context-orientation, but it has also been criticised for its linearity and its focus on the sender and the transmission of information rather than the communication (Larsson, 2008). The different versions of the model have nonetheless had a huge impact on the way communication is viewed among practitioners. However, *"when one considers that a word can have twenty-eight different meanings and that interpretation of each message depends upon the individual situation and the viewpoint of the communicators, the complexity of the communication process becomes evident"* (Goldhaber, 1993:128). The way

people express ideas verbally or non-verbally strongly depends on their background, experiences, and values. Due to this, communication does not necessarily result in mutual understanding. Disagreement can remain implicit or hidden because members of a group, for instance, might assume that they interpret things similarly when, in fact, they do not. Communication is far more complex than a model can describe, and *“the meaning is at least as much in the culture as in the message”* (Fiske, 1990:7). According to LaRay Barna (1998) and Carolyn Calloway-Thomas et al (1999), people tend to evaluate or assume that their own culture or way of life is the most natural. Barna (1998) also concludes that preconceptions and stereotypes as well as overgeneralised beliefs about others is something that we cannot avoid and using caricatures, stereotypes, and generalisations about others is common.

Another way of describing the communication process, compared to the earlier discussed transmission view, is Karl Weick’s (1995) theory of sense making that focuses on dialogue and shared meanings among organisational members. He argues that communication is the main process in creating an organisation. According to Weick (1995), people in an organisation have different backgrounds and their understanding and interpretation of events differ. This makes shared meanings difficult to achieve. In his view, the reception of messages is context dependent. Simonsson (2002) describes Weick’s view (1995) on context by defining it as multi-dimensional and names the context levels as:

- conversation context
- situation context
- organisational context
- society connected context.

Communication, it can be concluded, is context dependent. The main drive in creating an organisation is communication, and to reach shared meanings dialogue is needed.

A study that is relevant to this thesis is Mona Agerholm Andersen’s (2010) study of employee identification with newly introduced corporate values in a Danish windmill company put under financial pressure. She focused mainly on employees’ attitudes and participation and their reception of the corporate messages sent during the introductory stage of the change process. Agerholm Andersen (2010) used a multi-dimensional reception model

designed by Kim Christian Schrøder (2000) as a starting-point in her study. The dimensions of reception that Agerholm Andersen (2010) used were:

- the readers' motivation and comprehension of the text
- discrimination (the readers' ability of reading the text critically)
- the readers' subjective attitude towards the text
- the readers' implementation of the text in daily working routines

She found that the disparity between top management's views on the values and employees' reception of the values was significant. She connects this discrepancy between managers' views and employee reception to the company's historical and situational context. The company was in the early stages of an M&A that had been followed by times of financial crisis that led to restructuring of the organisation, hiring of a new managing director, and rounds of dismissals. Agerholm Andersen's (2010) results are well in line with those of Johansson (2003) who stressed the importance of context when discussing communication in organisations. She refers to the hierarchy within the organization, relationships between the employees, and the employees' social backgrounds and experiences in the company as vital elements in the reception of corporate management messages.

Based on the above theoretical contributions, this study will analyse employee perception as inspired by Weick (1995) and his view that the reception of messages is context dependent. My definition of the communication process is that it is continuous and can be described as both dynamic and culturally dependent. Communication is, in my view, an on-going process that is context dependent and through which activities, messages, and meanings are created, shaped, shared, and diversified.

### **3.1.2 Organisations**

Because this study is attempting to describe and analyse top management's use and the employees' perception of change communication practices in a culture change process during a major M&A, it is of vital importance to define my view of an organisation. An organisation is, according to Jorgen Bakka et al (1993), defined as a formally structured entity with a complex arrangement and with an aim for its existence. In order for an organisation to be created, certain features are indispensable: two or more people need to be involved, a goal is required, and some kind of activity is desirable. An

organisation needs a structure and is context dependent, in other words it requires an environment in which to function.

According to Miller (2006), the following classical perspectives on organisations include classical management theories as well as contemporary theories (Table 1):

- the system approaches, of which Weick's (1995) theory of sense-making is a typical example
- the cultural/symbolic approaches, for example, the modernistic, interpretative, and critical perspectives
- the critical approach, in which the emancipation of the employees and the power structures within an organisation are made visible.

*Table 1. Examples of theories within the classical perspectives on organisations according to Miller (2006).*

<i>Classical management theories</i>
human relations oriented approach
human resources approach
<i>Contemporary theories</i>
systems approaches
cultural/symbolic approaches
critical approach

According to Larsåke Larsson (1997, 2008), though, the one thing that unites all perspectives, theories, and approaches is that communication is a vital part of organizing.

The approaches that are most prevalent in today's research and in organisations are either based on classical management theories such as the one focused on a human relations oriented approach where personal satisfaction and meaning is of importance or the contemporary theories where the cultural/symbolic approach with its focus on values, attitudes, and behaviour is a growing field of interest among organisations (Larsson, 2008).

A long-held view of organisations has been that they can be seen as stable units, but Weick (1995) argues that organisations are dynamic systems in which the individuals engage in collective efforts to accomplish the goals of the organization. Weick (1995) thus moves away from concepts of

organisational adaptation and change and instead describes organisations as active and dynamic mergers of human behaviours and technological operations that are often described as the ‘act of organising’.

Because the description and analysis of organisational processes depends upon the kind of theoretical perspective used, it is important that I define my perspective. In this study, the main perspective lies within one of Miller’s (2006) contemporary theories, specifically the cultural/symbolic approach in which organisational culture is the main focus. The view on organisations in this study is inspired by Johansson (2003) who defines an organisation as something that exists when people are willing to engage and contribute to its existence and to communicate with each other in order to reach a common goal.

### **3.2 Organisational communication**

Having defined my perspectives on communication and organisations, it is time to define the main focus area of this study, which is organisational communication. Larsson (1997, 2008) describes organisational communication as including formal and informal communication, internal and external communication, and verbal and non-verbal communication.

According to Larsson (2008), organisational communication comprises two formal communication activities: market communication activities that include information given to the market and to customers and public relations communication that includes all other internal and external planned communication activities directed to the organisation’s different stakeholders. In addition to formal communications, an organisation’s communication also consists of a vast amount of informal communication. Internal and external communication can be considered as mutually inclusive activities (Cheney and Christensen, 2005), but they are commonly described as two different sets of activities. Internal communication focuses its activity on members of the organisation while external communication aims its activity at external parties such as the media, customers, and business owners (Larsson, 2008). I will, for the most part, study the formal, internal, and verbal communication within an organisation (Table 2).

Table 2. Organisational communication activities connected to my study (inspired by Larsson 1997, 2008)

Examples of activities in organisational communication		
Formal	Internal	Verbal
Planned communication	Targeted towards organisational members	Written and spoken communication
Transformation of information	Communication of visions, rules and regulations	Internal magazine
Structure content	Department meetings	Department meetings
Receiver of information identified	Manager-subordinate meetings	Web-based information

Organisational communication research had its breakthrough in the 1950s and 1960s and most of the studies at that time focused on internal communication. The origin of the field, however, dates back to the 1920s within the field of speech studies in the USA. Early studies often had a leadership perspective where communication was viewed as a leadership tool that could be used to attain greater efficiency within the organisation. These early studies also tended to consider communication in isolation from its broader context (Jablin & Putnam, 2001; Dalfelt et al, 2001). During the 1980s, new research perspectives, such as the interpretive and the critical perspectives (Dalfelt et al, 2001), took form within the research field of organisational communication. These new perspectives were in many ways similar to the ones developed within the organisational studies research field. The set of organisational communication research perspectives that are used most frequently, even today, are those presented by Charles Redding and Philipp Tompkins (1988):

- modernistic perspective
- culture-oriented perspective
- critical perspective

The *modernistic* perspective is guided by the concepts of efficiency and goal-orientation, and communication in this perspective is considered according to the classical view of the top-down transmission of information. The *critical* perspective emphasizes and studies the power and control over the construction of meaning within the organisation (Dalfelt et al, 2001; Johansson, 2003; Miller, 2006).

The *culture-oriented* perspective, which I am inspired by, takes the view that an organisation's ability to reach its goals, contrary to the modernistic

perspective, depends on the involvement of all of the organisation's members in the communication. The organisation's culture is viewed as the application of values, symbols, and behaviours and is considered the most important factor in reaching the goals of the organisation. Scholars have taken two different views of what culture means. According to one perspective, organisational culture is viewed as a variable, something that an organisation *has*, which means that communication can be used to maintain or change the organisational culture. The other perspective is that the organisational culture represents what an organisation *is*, which means that organizational culture is constructed through communication and shared actions. My view on organisational culture is that an organisation is constructed through communication and shared actions (see Chapter 3.4.1).

Johansson (2003), analyses how organisations communicate their strategy around visions and values from top to bottom, and this makes her research of great relevance to this thesis. Johansson's starting point is the question why organisational visions are often interpreted by employees as unintelligible and insignificant. Through a case study and through participant observation, discourse analysis, and interviews, Johansson found that communication about the company's strategy followed a typical top-down model that started on the group level and ended on the department level. In this process, the company under study used a balanced scorecard as a tool to communicate the strategy. She discovered that visions formulated by top managers met different realities constructed by managers at lower levels in the company. Managers' attitudes, knowledge, and interpretations were important individual factors that influenced communication about the company's strategy. Employees did not have the same detailed knowledge of the company strategy as the managers, nor were they given the same opportunities to obtain such knowledge.

Simonsson (2002) carried out one of the first Swedish studies focusing on communication between managers and employees in a modern organisation, which is also one of the aims of this study. Her assumption was that key concepts for good leadership are dialogue and making sense of messages within the organisation. Through a qualitative study with interviews and observations, she found that both managers and employees often neglect or misunderstand the communicative aspects of their respective roles. Communication is mainly seen as transmission of information and not as construction of meaning. Through her observations of meetings she found indications that middle managers in particular do not derive meaning from the information but act as simple information disseminators.

Both Simonsson (2002) and Johansson (2003, 2007) define the communication process as continuous, dynamic, and culturally dependent. They suggest that the on-going process of communicating organisational messages reflects the shared realities resulting from previous message exchange and evolves to generate new realities that create and shape events. These shared meanings contribute to the creation of relationships and assist both individuals and organisations in achieving the goals and activities of an organisation.

In this study, organisational communication is perceived as a process through which organisations are created and maintained. Communication is the on-going process through which activities, messages, and meanings are created and shaped.

### **3.3 Organisational communication in change processes**

Because this study is specifically directed at studying an organisation that aims to change its culture into a unified company with shared vision and values, the concepts of organisational change and change communication are central to this study. In addition, because communication is considered to be an inseparable and important element in change processes in organisations (Lewis 2000; Balogun 2006; Johansson 2011), the focus of this section is on organisational communication in change processes in general and on culture change processes specifically.

There are two different viewpoints that predominate in organisational change research. Either an organisation is considered to be unchanging and the change process is a temporary condition or the organisation is considered to be in a constant dynamic state where change occurs daily and the change process is simply an added factor (Hatch, 2004; Johansson, 2011; Torppa & Smith, 2011). Research on organisational change usually concentrates on a continuous and dynamic change process as compared to an irregular and temporary change process, which is both difficult to find and to follow (Johansson, 2011). A continuous change can either be a planned and conscious attempt to change the organisation with regard to technologies, processes, programs, and policies or not planned, meaning the everyday changes occurring in daily work (Lewis, 2000, Johansson 2011). Because this study focuses on a company introducing shared vision and values, I will cover the more common research topic of initiated planned change.

Kezar (2001:12) claims that “*understanding the process of change is critical to successful implementation*”. According to her, however, initiators of planned



change processes often neglect to analyse the reasons for change. Questions of why to change, what is to be changed, how the change shall be done, and what is the desired outcome of change must be answered (Kezar, 2010).

- The *why* is the source of forces from the external and/or internal environment that initiate a change process.
- The *what* is the degree, scale, and focus of the change process.
- The *how* is the timing of the change process, as well as whether the change process is planned/unplanned, active/static, proactive/reactive.
- The *outcome*, which might be measurable (for example, new structures and technologies) or non-measurable (for example, new cultures and individual beliefs).

Lewis et al (2006) reviewed the organisational change and change communication literature and compared books aimed at practitioners in the field to scientific manuscripts. They found the following common themes between the two genres in advising the readers of how to introduce and work with change:

- the significance of widespread participation among the organisation members
- keeping the flow of communication/information going
- the importance of communication about the purpose of change

All literature acknowledged the critical importance of communication in the change process. The differences between the two genres were that in the 'easy-solution' books, the models were presented on a basic level without giving any deeper theoretical explanations about the different pieces of advice. They merely told the users how to do things but seldom explained why. In the scientific literature, the different areas of study were thoroughly investigated but these seldom included more than just parts of a model, i.e. one or two factors of the change process at the same time, and this made it difficult to grasp the overall picture. This might be one of the reasons why practitioners tend to keep to and believe the so-called easy solutions.

Frahm and Brown (2005), Johansson and Heide (2008), and Johansson (2011) talk about three types of change communication research approaches in their literature review of research articles published between 1995 and

2007. They found and categorized the following three communication approaches that are used during organisational change:

1. Communication as a tool for change, which is considered leadership and efficiency oriented
2. Communication as a process in which meaning and understanding are the motor and motivator and through which communicational change is acquired
3. Communication as a social change where communication itself is the change. The central focal point in this perspective is the struggle over the meaning of the change

These three approaches are in many ways directly comparable with the three organisational communication perspectives presented by Redding and Tompkins (1988). The view I am inspired by, where communication is considered a process, is compiled by Johansson and Heide (2008) in Table 3. That view is compared with the two other approaches concerning research goals, metaphors of organisation, views on change, and types of communication methods.

*Table 3. The three communication approaches in organisational change studies as categorized by Johansson and Heide (2008). My view is presented in the box.*

	<b>Communication as a tool</b>	<b>Communication as a process</b>	<b>Communication as a social transformation</b>
<i>Research goal</i>	Effectiveness	Understanding	Awareness
<i>Metaphor of organisations</i>	Rational system	Sense-making system	Political system
<i>Change</i>	Planned	Emergent	Emergent
<i>Communication</i>	Tool for transmission	Interpretation	Constitutive
<i>Management</i>	Managing change	Managing understanding	Managing change through communication

These three communication approaches to change can also be called programmatic and participatory implementation approaches. Programmatic implementation of change emphasizes the transmission of monologue communication in a top-down manner, and the participatory implementation approach favours dialogue and stakeholder involvement (Russ, 2008). Based on the perspective in this study, in which organizational communication is viewed as an on-going, context-dependent process

through which organisations are created and maintained, I support the view in which organisational change processes are dynamic and a participatory implementation approach is favoured.

In a participatory approach, stakeholder involvement is a necessity and key persons in the change process are the *change agents*, the persons involved in creating change. They can either be managers introducing change or people who are tasked with being change coordinators. The change agent's ability to bring the project to a successful outcome is usually connected to networking and interpersonal skills. Having an influence on the organisation is a plus, especially when having no clear mandate power or no management role (Balogun et al, 2005). In Aastrup's (2000) network model (the change process model guiding me in my analysis of the culture change process), the change process is described as an on-going process that is equally dependent on human agencies, practices, and structures. The change agent in Aastrup's (2000) model is named agency and is the individual who is intentionally causing an event within the structure. According to Aastrup (2000), a structure refers to social structures made up of a set of positions with different access to resources, such as time, money, and power. Practice is defined as the choices and intentions made by the agency within the given structure. The structure and practice, according to Aastrup (2000), can be compared with Balogun et al's (2005) description of four dimensions of organisational life that influence the change agents' ability to induce change. These four dimensions are the following:

1. which priorities are made at management levels
2. the possibility of local autonomy
3. the structure and use of financial measurement and reporting systems
4. the structure and use of a reward and performance system

In her study of 89 change agents in American companies aiming to change their company's structure, Lewis (2000) found that problems concerning communication were considered among the most problematic factors when the change agents looked back on their change processes. She also found some other barriers for a successful change in organisations, such as power struggles among managers, lack of management support, unclear purpose of the intended change, resistance among employees, and uncertainty about the employees' futures.

Sara von Platen (2006) reached a similar conclusion when investigating how internal communication and sense-making processes contributed to the perception of strategic change among the members of a public service organisation, Sveriges Television (SVT). Her study is of interest to this study due to her emphasis on employee perception and reception of messages. Her focus was on how management planned the organisation's internal communication around the strategic change, the outcome of the internal communication plan connected to the change, and how the members of the organisation understood the reason for the strategic change and the internal communication related to the change. Through a case study involving observation and interviews with employees at two units, she concluded that internal communication is central for how members of an organisation make sense of, and participate in, major changes. However, the employees seldom experienced that the information had been sufficient and that they had been included in the change process.

The most influential factor determining how people made sense of change-related communication was connected to the organisation members' everyday working life that constituted their frames of reference. If the change communication related to their reality, they could grasp the concept. If the members of the organisation did not like the reasons behind the change and failed to act upon it, the internal communication did not fulfil its purpose and gaps of understanding arose. von Platen (2006) also found that important factors influencing the employees' ability to make sense of the changes were their organisational identities, which organisational group they perceived that they belonged to, and their roles and status within the organisation. In the end, however, the most influential frames of reference for interpreting organisational change turned out to be the personality of the organisation's members and their individual context.

In a study by Dennis Self et al (2007) of a telecommunication company facing an organisational change, it was shown that resistance to change was connected to threats the employees felt to their jobs. The more threatened the employees felt, the less positive they were toward the change. Self et al (2007) also found that if the employees perceived the organisational support as low they resisted the change to a higher degree. This is well in line with Sarala's (2010) study on domestic and international acquisitions carried out by Finnish corporations during the years 2001–2004. In that study, she describes several aspects regarding organisational members' reactions, such as a lack of sense of control, an increased uncertainty about the future, and fear of losing their jobs when involved in an acquisition that would affect the post-merger performance.

Overall, the studies discussed above show that during a change process it is vital to take into account the employees' needs for reassurance about their future, an understanding of organisational culture dimensions, and the need for a well planned strategy for communication during the change process.

### **3.4 Change communication process and its practices**

So far I have presented my perspective on organisational communication and change communication as a dynamic and on-going process. I also consider organisational communication and change communication to be contextually and culturally dependent, that the meaning and understanding are the motor and motivator, and that change comes about through communication. In order to achieve the purpose of this thesis, which is to describe and analyse both the top management's use and the employees' perception and understanding of change communication practices in a culture change process during a major M&A, I will need to clarify my view on culture and other elements included in the change communication processes. In the next section I will discuss the role of organisational culture and the use of strategic communication and rhetoric in the change communication process.

#### **3.4.1 The role of organisational cultures in change communication**

As mentioned earlier, context is important in the change communication process. The context and the organisational culture are very much connected, and Balogun (2001), when discussing change in organisations, emphasizes the importance of acknowledging and mapping the organisational culture before introducing change. This is especially important because commitment and resistance to change are both connected to the employees' everyday working life and, therefore, to the organisation's culture. One of the first to link culture and communication together was Hall (1959) in his book *The Silent Language*. Hall (1959) states that culture is communication and communication is culture because communication is the glue that links people together and depends on people's cultural background in a similar manner to the way people can express ideas verbally or non-verbally.

In the culture-oriented perspective of organisational communication, organisations are often described in terms of metaphors (organisations are seen, for example, as machines, organisms, political systems, or cultures) and the focus of this perspective lies on language, narratives, symbols, meanings, and organisational culture (Dalfelt et al, 2001; Hatch 2004). In

this perspective, culture can be viewed either as something an organisation *has* or something that an organisation *is*. If one considers culture as something an organisation *has*, then culture is possible to change via management-led activities (Hofstede, 1997; Trompenaars & Hampden-Turner, 1998, 2000), and this is a view that many practitioners have. If, on the other hand, one considers culture as something that an organisation *is*, then culture is seen as being constructed by people and reproduced by the networks of symbols and meanings. This unites people making shared action possible, and change is achieved through interaction between the people within the organisation (Smircich, 1983; Martin & Meyerson, 1987, 1988; Alvesson, 1993, 2001;b).

Joanne Martin and Deborah Meyerson (1987, 1988) designed a theoretical model based on a massive literature review that identifies three different major perspectives when studying and understanding organisational cultures (Frost, 1991; Martin, 2002). They called them the integration perspective, the differentiation perspective, and the fragmentation perspective, or as Anette Risberg (1999) summarises it, the three major ways of comprehending the idea of organisational culture (Table 4). According to Martin (2002:156), however, “*a particular culture is not more, or less, accurately represented by one of these perspectives. There is no such thing as an ‘integrated culture’ or a ‘fragmented culture’. There can, however, be a culture viewed from the integration perspective, and such a view is incomplete until that culture is examined from the differentiation and fragmentation perspectives*”.

The integration perspective views culture in terms of clear and consistent values, interpretations, and assumptions that are shared on an organisation-wide basis. The differentiation perspective views organisational culture as a mosaic of inconsistencies in which meanings are sometimes shared but even then only primarily within subculture boundaries. The fragmentation perspective focuses predominantly on the experience and expression of ambiguity within organisational cultures and on conflictive meanings rather than consensus.

Table 4. Martin and Meyerson’s (1987, 1988) definition of the three different major perspectives in studies on organisational culture

Martin and Meyerson’s definition of three perspectives on organisational culture		
<i>Integration</i>	<i>Differentiation</i>	<i>Fragmentation</i>
Organisation wide consensus	Subcultural consensus	Lack of consensus

Some researchers (and most of the practitioners in this field) view an organisation as having a single culture (Schein, 1985, Martin, 2002). Edgar Schein (1985) suggests that the reasons for building a shared organisational culture are an organisation's need to manage external adaptation to obtain a shared understanding of the group's primary task and to develop a consensus of the organization's goals and means to obtain these goals. One example of a study taking its point of departure from the *integration perspective* is that carried out by Peter Beusch (2007). His study is one of the few studies in a Nordic context analysing M&As from an organisational communication point of view, which is also the case with this thesis. He found that when management in cross-cultural settings are having problems in their governance of the organisation, management usually connects the problems to behaviour and attitudes among employees. Management control, usually described as a set of rules and regulations, is, described by the informants (both managers and employees) in his study as being a set of culturally dependent behaviour patterns based on a collection of ideas, assumptions, and frameworks rather than as a physical framework. He claims that the primary factors that enhance management control are the power of the rhetoric used to support management and the skill of the change agents who wish to persuade and convince other actors of the strengths and advantages of engaging in a particular activity. Beusch (2007) concludes that interpretation and translation of management control models are major drivers in creating a common management control language of clarified images and shared meaning and understanding. This in turn requires direct interaction and communication between actor groups.

The view that organisational culture is about shared values does, however, meet some opposition, and Barbara Czarnaiawska-Joerges (1992:185) states that "*the notion of a uniformly shared organisational culture, /.../, seems to receive neither theoretical nor empirical support, only normative*". There are researchers who view an organisation as full of smaller and sometimes contradictory subcultures such as Martin and Meyerson's (1987, 1988) *differentiation perspective* in which subcultures are part of the pattern. "*What is unique about a given organisation's culture, /.../, is the particular mix of subculture differences that emerges within a particular organisational context*" (Frost, 1991:57). A study that relates to the ideas of Martin and Meyerson's (1987, 1988) differentiation perspective is that of Manoocher Kavooosi (2005) who studied organisational culture and group dynamics in international joint ventures. This is also a study of interest for this thesis because it discusses cultural differences in connection with international M&As. According to Kavooosi (2005), the failure rate in economic terms in cooperation between companies with different cultural background in comparison with partnerships between the same culture groups is relatively high. He suggests

that cultural awareness will emerge as the outcome of group interactions through the conscious act of its members when the members of the group are sincerely oriented towards reaching understanding. This requires that the members must be aware of their own, as well as the other party's, culture and behavioural patterns and that they must also be patient. The analysis of different M&As in his study showed that awareness of cultural differences by group members contributes to a positive outcome of an M&A and that the lack of awareness has a negative impact.

While most researchers study what is shared in an organisational culture, a few researchers analyse what is not shared. Alvesson (1993) even discusses the notion of ambiguity in the organisation as one of the main dimensions in steering a company forward, thus viewing organisational culture from Martin and Meyerson's (1987, 1988) *fragmentation perspective*. Another researcher analysing an organisation from a fragmentation perspective is Risberg (1999) who studied the employees' views on an organisation and its development in two different post-acquisition processes. Her study is of interest to this thesis due to her attention to the employees' perceptions about their involvement in an M&A, something this thesis emphasises as well. In her study of Kone Cranes Oy and their acquisitions during the 1990s, Risberg (1999) found a company with a fragmented culture. She interpreted the employees' situation to be more or less inconsistent and confusing based on the multiple interpretations among the employees about their situation in the post-acquisition process. Risberg's (1999) study reveals how various employees interpret objectives, corporate identity, and other meanings associated with the post-acquisition process differently as well as what roles these multiple interpretations play during this critical process. Two acquisitions were used as cases to illustrate fragmentation in the acquisition processes. Through interviews at both the acquiring and the acquired companies, she found that case studies such as these show the additional understanding that a fragmentation approach can provide by embracing contradictory, confusing, and inconsistent employee interpretations instead of only capturing the employees' shared experiences. Moreover, the study found that the acquisition process was experienced very differently depending on the person's background, present situation, position, and surrounding environment. Some interpretations are unique for some individuals while others are shared in and between groups.

Based on the earlier description of my views on organisational communication and change communication, I support the view of the benefit obtained by considering organisational cultural diversity within the area of organisational culture. Martin Parker (2000) proposed that organisational cultures should be seen as fragmented entities in which members identify



themselves as unified at some times and divided at others. A theme discussed among scholars today suggests how organisations can become more creative and more profitable organisations if they take a multicultural organisational culture perspective seriously (Alvesson, 2001;b; Martin, 2002; Stahl et al 2010). Eisenberg (1984) called this view ‘unified diversity’ and argued that organisations are multicultural, and these multiple organisational cultures are held together by what Parker (2000:81) refers to as ‘*stabilizations of meaning*’. Stabilization of meaning is the existence of both static aspects, such as a common framework of rules of behaviour, and dynamic aspects, such as norms that change over time. Other researchers, such as Nakiye Boyacigiller et al (1996) and Adriana Garibaldi de Hilal (2006), argue in favour of what they call the multicultural perspective in which the members of any particular group maintain simultaneous memberships in other groups within the boundaries of a single organisation. They claim that many types of organisational cultural groupings can exist and coexist within one specific organisational setting, and this could be compared to a situation in which all of Martin and Meyerson’s (1987, 1988) described perspectives are present in the organisation at the same time. Eisenberg and Riley (2001:301) embrace all three perspectives and note through Martin’s perspectives “*that any culture, at any point in time, has some aspects congruent with all three perspectives*”.

To summarize this section, I am inspired in this study by the integration, differentiation, and fragmentation perspectives of Martin and Meyerson’s view (1987, 1988) on organisational culture perspectives, and I consider these three perspectives to exist simultaneously within an organisation. My view of organisations is that they are multicultural and that these multiple organisational cultures are held together by ‘*stabilizations of meaning*’ (Parker, 2000:81) and a constant flux of communication between the members of the organisation.

#### **3.4.2 The role of strategic communication in change communication**

Managers constantly create messages to be communicated within the organisation, and this is especially important in organisational change processes. What to communicate, when to communicate, and how to communicate during change is of vital importance for a positive outcome. Strategic communication handled wisely might be the key to get commitment to change rather than resistance to change (Morténus et al, 2012).

Strategic communication is the combination of the words strategy and communication. Strategy is the bridge between policy or higher-order goals on the one hand and tactics or concrete actions on the other. Strategy is a term that comes from the Greek *strategia*, meaning generalship. In the military, strategy often refers to manoeuvring troops into position before the enemy is actually engaged (Nickols, 2000). Harry Sminia (2009:99) defined the formation of strategy in organisations as “...the collusion over time of deliberate managerial intentions (often in the form of strategic choices), the subsequent implementation efforts and the unanticipated emerging developments, which together result in resources being allocated, strategic positions being taken up, and performance being achieved”.

Strategic communication, as an academic field, is described as organisational communication, a part of organisational communication, or organisational communication with an aim. However, many researchers disagree on the significance of strategic communication and also on the amount of (planned) strategy involved in strategic communication. Many researchers and practitioners who consider communication as a tool for change look upon strategic communication as a functional management tool. These researchers and practitioners believe that the proper use of strategic communication can be used to steer a company in the direction of a more profitable and more efficient organisation.

Hallahan et al (2007) suggest that persuasion is the essence of strategic communication and defend the use of strategic communication as an integral part of the interaction between the organisation and its internal and external stakeholders and the role it plays in shaping the organisation's identity and image. Jesper Falkheimer and Mats Heide (2007) present a goal-oriented model for strategic communication as a way to reduce the polarising views on strategic communication among members of the research community (Figure 3). According to them, strategic communication contributes to the efficiency of the organisation by delivering the correct messages at the correct time through the appropriate use of communication channels. Strategic communication is also part of creating change or preserving the image that the surrounding community might have of the organisation. Strategic communication can also help to change or support the organisation's culture(s) or identity. If the organisation constitutes a democratic and non-authoritarian structure, strategic communication can also support transparency and openness in the communication.

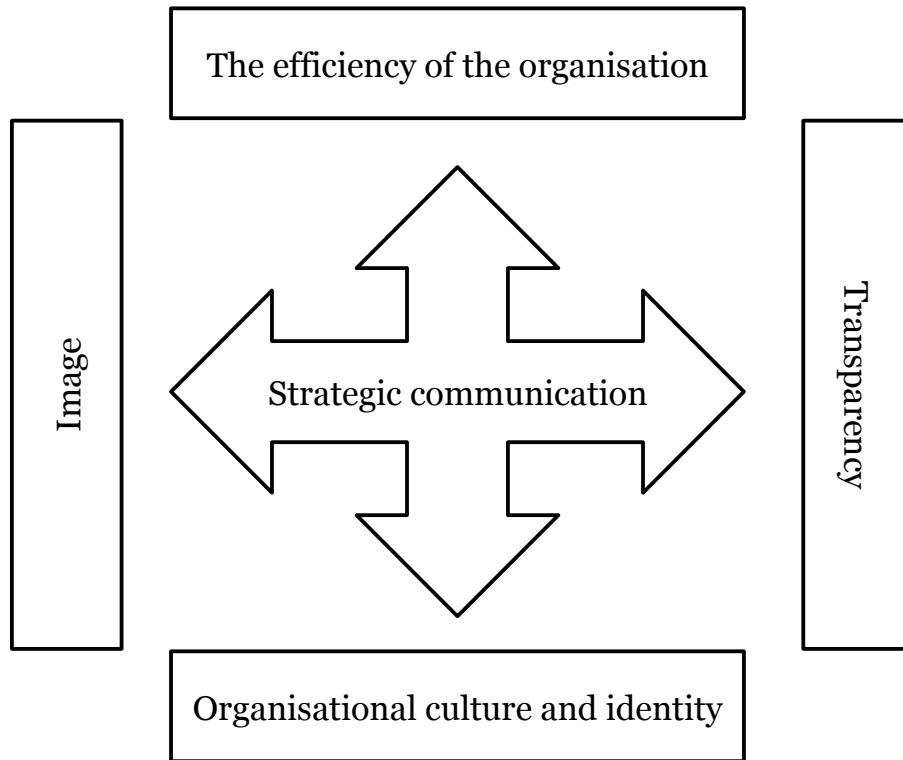


Figure 3. The goal- oriented model for strategic communication by Falkheimer and Heide (2007)

In this study, I have defined strategic communication as part of organisational communication in which strategic communication consists of internal, external, informal, formal, verbal, and non-verbal communication with a specific aim. Organisational communication is all of those and everything else communicated within the framework of an organisation.

### **3.4.3 The role of rhetoric in change communication**

Organisations exist when there is a common goal. The goal needs to be communicated within the organisation, and how that goal is communicated could, as Hallahan et al (2007) describes it, involve informational, relational, discursive, and persuasive communication when used to achieve the organisation's mission. The art of persuasion is called rhetoric, and rhetoric is also an important element of change communication (Müllern & Stein, 1999; Municio-Larsson, 1999; Johansson, 2007).

The history of rhetoric dates back to Aristotle who called it the study of persuasion. Classical rhetoric was used either as a form of persuasion or manipulation or as the study of effective speaking and writing. Up until the last decade, the art of rhetoric was mainly connected to the effective speaking and writing side of the classical concept of rhetoric and was used to analyse memorable speeches such as those of Winston Churchill to the British people during the Second World War and Martin Luther King's speech in 1953 by the Lincoln monument in Washington and, more recently, the Swedish King's speech at the memorial service for the Tsunami victims in 2005 and US President Obama's inauguration speech in 2009.

Classical rhetoric is said to focus mainly on how a message is being communicated and not as much on what the message is trying to say. However, this thesis emphasises the new way of interpreting rhetoric in which researchers such as Tomas Müllern and Johan Stein (1999) stress the importance of context when analysing rhetoric and of focusing less on the study of effective speaking and writing. They describe the new rhetoric from a social constructive perspective and claim that rhetoric is more about sense-making processes (in which content and meaning are constructed and interpreted through interaction) rather than persuasion. Thus they suggest that it is not only the way the words are used that defines successful use of rhetoric but also that the environment in which the rhetoric is used is important for the reception and understanding of the message. The new way of looking at rhetoric stresses the receivers' understanding and reception of the message as more important than the sender's intention for the given message. This has implications for this thesis because it aims to analyse both the texts used in the introduction of the common vision and values (the sender's perspective) and the employees' perception of change communication practices in a culture change process (the receiver's perspective). Sonja Foss (1996) adheres to the Müllern and Stein (1999) view and connects rhetoric with symbols used in the communication. She declares that rhetoric is an action and that it is through the use of rhetoric (such as verbal and non-verbal communication and symbols) that we are able to communicate with one another.

Even further away from the classical description of rhetoric is the new paradigm of 'constricted and constructed potentiality' (Foss & Foss, 2011). One can criticize the meaning and the use of the term 'potentiality', but I will use it because the researchers have chosen it as their term. In this paradigm, rhetoric is presented from two viewpoints. In the first viewpoint – the constricted potentiality, persuasion is seen as the key to acquire change. The desired change in the constricted potentiality is brought about via a specified plan and precise steps, and the persuasive strategies are focused on those

individuals who are the cause or the solution for the reason for change. The second viewpoint, the constructed potentiality, is a process-oriented rhetoric that has its origin in a person's attitudes and behaviours. The constructed potentiality uses interpretation as a strategy for change and the focus of the effort is aimed internally. This means that one must change oneself before changing others, and the route towards change is unspecified, no plans are made, and changes occur as they come (an internal process). The proposed viewpoint of constructed potentiality, with its focus on self-change, could be of help in understanding, for instance, change acquired via grass-roots activities. The constructed potentiality viewpoint does have some connection to Agerholm Andersen's (2010:116) reception studies of a windmill plant in Denmark where she found that one of the reasons why the employees felt distanced from the wording of the new values was that "*... the employees did not feel that top management lived up to the value statement themselves*". If the managers did not bother to change according to the newly launched values, why should the employees?

My view on rhetoric is inspired by Müllern and Stein (1999) and Sonja Foss and Karen Foss (2011) where the importance of context, when evaluating rhetoric, is stressed as well as the constructed potentiality paradigm with its focus on self-change being a requirement before change can occur in a larger context.

### **3.5 Integration of approaches, theories and perspectives**

In this chapter I have brought forward the notion that the issues of change, communication, and culture in an organisational context are all interrelated. My view on communication is as a context-dependent and on-going process through which activities, messages, and meanings are created and shaped. I view organisation as something that exists when people are willing to engage and contribute to its existence and to communicate with each other in order to reach a common goal. My view on communication together with my view on organisations has inspired me to take the culture-oriented perspective in organisational communication as well as to view communication as a process within the change process (Dalfelt et al, 2001; Simonsson, 2002; Johansson, 2003). I have summarized the different areas of theories and perspectives that I have used in this study in Table 5.

Table 5. The different areas of theories and perspectives that have guided me in this study

Areas of theory	Perspective adopted in this study	Contributors in this study
<i>Ontological and epistemological framework</i>	Critical realism	Bhaskar (1998); Aastrup (2000); Danemark (2003)
<i>Communication</i>	Communication is a context-dependent and on-going process, through which activities, messages, and meanings are created and shaped	Weick (1995); Barna (1998); Johansson (2003, 2007)
<i>Organisation</i>	Exists when people are prepared to contribute to its existence and to communicate with each other in order to reach a common goal.	Larsson (2008); Johansson (2011)
<i>Organisational communication</i>	Is perceived a process through which organisations are created and maintained and I am inspired by the culture-oriented tradition	Dalfelt et al (2001); Simonsson (2002); Johansson (2003, 2007)
<i>Change communication</i>	Is considered a process, where meaning and understanding are the motor and motivator and through which communication change is acquired	Lewis (2000, 2006); Kezar (2001); Frahm et al (2005); Balogun (2006); von Platen (2006); Johansson & Heide (2008); Johansson (2011)
<i>Organisational culture</i>	Considers culture as something the organisation is, based on the Martin & Meyerson organisational culture perspective and a multi-cultural approach	Martin & Meyerson (1987, 1988); Martin (1992, 2002); Alvesson (1993, 2001;b)
<i>Strategic communication</i>	Is considered as part of organisational communication, i.e., it is organisational communication with a specific aim	Hallahan et al (2007); Falkheimer & Heide (2007)
<i>Rhetoric</i>	Is viewed from the new rhetoric perspective and inspired by the constricted and constructed potentiality paradigm	Karlberg & Mral (1998); Müllern & Stein (1999); Foss & Foss (2011)

A common theme in the presented framework of theories and perspectives is that they are process-oriented, which is in line with my intent to study change communication practices in a culture change process. Kezar (2001:22) refers to the concept of process as “...the way in which change happens. Adaptive, generative, proactive, reactive, planned, and unplanned are different characterizations of the process of change”. Warner Burke (2008) claims that a process view in change communication addresses the so called how, the roles of the participants and the strategies required for realisation of a culture change process.

Based on the purpose of this study, my view on communication and organisation, and the process-oriented approach of the study, I have derived three analytical aspects that are central to the understanding of a culture change process and change communication practices. These three analytical aspects are also inspired by Phillip Clampitt and Laurey Berk (1996) and Balogun (2001) based on their previous contributions to the understanding of culture change processes. In the method chapter I will further describe how these three analytical aspects relate to my study and to the research questions.

1. The role of culture
2. Change communication methods:
  - a. Strategic communication
  - b. Rhetoric and formally constructed communications
  - c. Activities
3. Employee perception and understanding of change processes

1) *The role of culture:* As discussed in this chapter, previous studies have shown how an organisation's culture(s) affects the outcome of any planned change and is, of course, the focus when a culture change process is being realised. The role of culture is my first analytical aspect. Phillip Clampitt and Laurey Berk (1996) claim that context and organisational culture have a huge impact on the organisational change process. One important issue to note, according to Gail Latta (2009), is the multidimensional role of organisational culture and how the cultural dynamics can influence the outcome of a change process. Therefore, the Martin and Meyerson (1987, 1988) perspective is interesting in this study because it acknowledges the existence of more than one manifestation of culture within an organisation. All of the above discussed details connect well to the critical realism theory that urges the researcher to explore the transitive and, if possible, parts of the intransitive realities.

According to Bryan Taylor et al (2006), critical realism suits communication researchers well. If they use Martin and Meyerson's three perspectives model (1987, 1988) as the general model of study, "*they [communication scholars – my comment] would view communication as the means of continuously creating, reproducing, and transforming the ideal realities associated with these classifications (and also the ideally real components of their artifactual and social realities). They would reject, finally, implications that communication in and about*

*organisational culture is determined by material reality, corresponds to its objective essence, or is merely a manifestation of pre-existing ideal realities” (Taylor, 2006:324). Taylor et al (2006), similarly to Hall (1959), emphasise that culture arises from communication practices and that communication practices are the result of cultural background. Balogun (2001:2) states that “change is about changing people, not organisations. Organisations change when managers and employees change their way of doing business” and thereby emphasises the role of the members in the organisation and the members practices. In other words, managers have the potential to affect organisational culture, but it is the members of the organisation who decide to what extent that potential is realized (Hatch, 2004).*

*2) Change communication methods:* These methods can be described in many ways and are, as previous studies have shown, very important in the realisation of a culture change process. Change communication methods are my second analytical aspect. There is seldom one solution or method suitable for all change situations (Kezar, 2001), and in this thesis I describe the use of strategic communication, rhetoric and formally constructed communication, and practical activities as examples of viable change communication methods.

*2a) Strategic communication:* The role of strategic communication in the change process is to discuss values, norms, and issues; to help members of an organisation understand why a change is brought about; to conceptualise and plan the communication; and to execute the communication plan (Falkheimer & Heide, 2007). One vital part of strategic communication is the role of the change agents in the change process. Helena Morténus et al (2012) found in their 12-year long-term study that strategic communication was of great importance in the efforts to change work practices among primary care staff in a healthcare setting. The intention of that change process was to bridge the gap between new R&D ideas and changing work practices. In their study, they found that the strategy of appointing long-term change communication agents who acted as spokespersons for the new ideas was the reason behind the easier acceptance of changing work practices. Beusch (2007) emphasizes the importance of direct interactions and communication among change agents and how a language of clarified images and shared meanings can create a better understanding of the change process among organisational members.

*2b) Rhetoric and formally constructed change communication:* According to according to Ingegerd Municio-Larsson (1999:269) “the rhetorical feature of communication, /.../ is particularly apparent in times of



*change*". The reliance on rhetoric becomes evident in times of change, but Municio-Larsson (ibid) warns that the use of empty rhetoric may cause damage to a cultural change process. Alvesson (1993) discusses the importance of consistent rhetoric in the construction and operation of an organisation from the standpoint that knowledge among the organisations' members is ambiguous. Examples of things to consider when it comes to formally constructed change communication is the type of message to give (positive/balanced), how much information/communication to distribute in the organisation and in what form (distributing information or communication), stakeholders, and motivational factors (Lewis, 2007). Other features to consider in the change communication process are what Kezar (2001) describes as the timing (the when to change) and if the change process is planned/unplanned, active/static, or proactive/reactive in its nature.

*2c) Activities:* These concern the practical details and actual activities of a change process and are more about realizing the above described methods. I will only describe the activities performed by Company X in this study in the methodological chapter and will not analyse them further. I have, therefore, decided not to define this third part of the change communication method in a more theoretical fashion.

*3) Employee perception and understanding of change processes:* The employees' perception and understanding of the change process is one of the most important factors in a culture change process. Employee perception and understanding are my third analytical aspect. According to Choi (2011), employees' understanding of the change process influences any change process, and von Platen (2006) found in her study that how employees made sense of changes was based on their organisational identities, which organisational group they perceived that they belonged to, and their roles and status within the organisation. Risberg (1999) found that the acquisition process was experienced very differently depending on the person's background and present situation and position in the organisation and that these experiences affected the employees' understanding of change. Finally, Self et al (2007) found that the bigger the threat the employees felt to their job the less positive they were toward the change, and if they perceived that organisational support was lacking they tended to resist the change to a higher degree.

In this chapter, I have presented a wide range of theories and perspectives, all of which are involved in the process of change communication. My framework in all of these theories and perspectives is process oriented, and I am also guided in my analyses by the critical realism theory and Aastrup's

(2000) model (see Chapter 2). This means that I will analyse the observable phases of the change process as well as identify the role of structural factors (organisational culture) on human agency (employees and management in the organisation I study) and on generating practices (change communication practices), or in Kezar's (2001:22) words, "...*the way in which change happens*".

## 4 The Company and the case

*“A case is a single instance; a sample of one”* (Easton, 2010:119).

Company X had acquired four large companies within a time period of four years. The acquisition period ended the year before my study began and the company went through a major post-M&A period. Because of the extensive M&As, the top management of Company X decided that the company needed a common vision and common values to unite what they saw to be a diversified company. The process of introducing common vision and values gave me an opportunity to study a post-M&A culture change process as well as the change communication methods used in the introduction of the proposed common vision and values. Because I followed the communications within Company X over the entire 18-month introduction process, I was able to perform an empirical longitudinal study, which is rare in the study of post-M&A culture change processes (Kezar, 2001; Lewis, 2007; Lofqvist 2011).

According to Geoff Easton (2010), case studies are used when trying to answer research questions starting with how and why. Easton (2010) suggests that case research can be used as a research method when investigating one or a small number of social units/organisations, or in situations in which data are collected from multiple sources, to develop a holistic description of the case through an iterative research process. He also emphasises that case studies based on critical realism suits studies of organisations and networks.

Before going into the methodology issues in the next chapter, I will describe the company where the study took place and the specific case that has been the target of my study.

### 4.1 The company - Company X

The subject of my study was Company X, an international company with its main market in Europe. Company X was one of Europe's biggest companies within its line of business and consisted of production, sales, and a merchant organisation. Its head office was in Europe and it had 22 000 employees in 2002. Company X's turnover was 6.9 million Euros in 2001.

From 1997 to 2001, Company X acquired four large Europe-based companies and by 2002 the company had 23 production units throughout Europe. Apart from the production units, the company also consisted of four

business areas, one merchant group, and a number of staff functions such as human resources, corporate communications, and financial matters. Table 6 provides descriptions of Company X's different cultural backgrounds.

Table 6. Descriptions of the different cultural backgrounds of Company X

<i>Nations</i>	Austria, Finland, France, Germany, Great Britain, Hungary, Sweden, and Switzerland and a global presence in the Sales & Merchant organisation
<i>Positions</i>	Connected to hierarchy
<i>Units</i>	Business areas, Production, Sales, Staff, and others such as R&D
<i>Professions</i>	More than 100 professions are found within the company
<i>Gender</i>	80% male and 20% female

The organisation was a hierarchical matrix organisation (Figure 4) and a large number of the employees reported to more than one manager. Sales were done via the sales organisation that was positioned within the business areas, the merchant group, and through external agents.

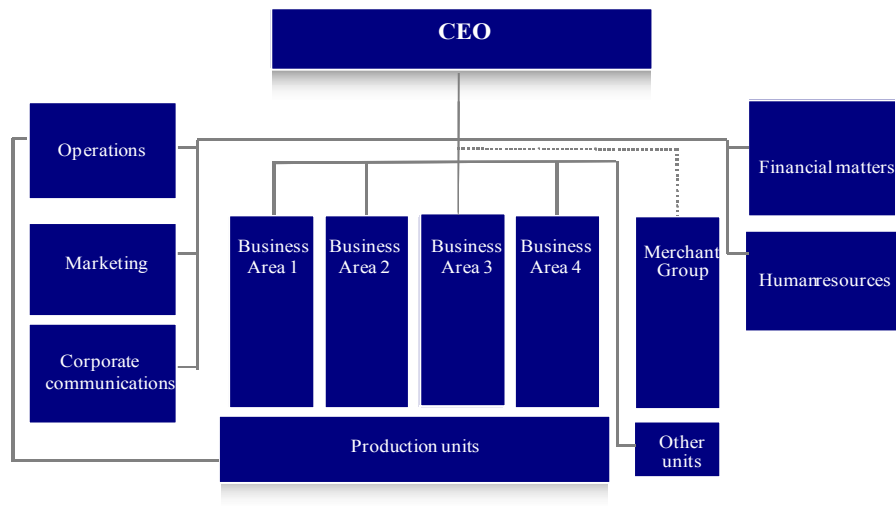


Figure 4. Company X organisational chart, 2002

As a result of the M&As, Company X gained employees from several additional countries. All the acquired companies had long company histories. Due to these acquisitions, Company X reorganised several times in 2001 and 2002, sold off production units, and handed out notices of dismissal to employees. During the same period, the economic climate in Company X became weaker due to the global recession and more and more pressure was put on the newly merged organisation to be profitable. Above

all, employees had to get to know each other and make new bonds with employees from other corporate, national, and professional cultures. As a consequence, old networks changed and new ones developed. Company X's weaker economic situation, the reorganisations, and the building of new networks affected the organisation in several ways. The cooperation between different units and different project groups and between employees and management did not always work as smoothly as the top management wanted and intended. In other words, top management had a difficult and complicated task to unite several different company cultures and values into the anticipated one company culture.

#### **4.2 The case – The Corporate Culture project**

In the early spring of 2001, the top management of Company X decided that the company needed a common vision and common values to unite the diversified company. They contacted a consulting firm (referred to hereafter as the Consultant Firm), a large international advertising company, that took on the job of helping Company X to create and introduce its new set of vision and values.

The Consultant Firm conducted a series of interviews with the top management (20 in total) aiming at finding out what the top management thought was important to be part of the proposed vision and values. The results of the top management interviews were then discussed in a top management workshop (including the top 100 managers in Company X) held by the Consultant Firm. In May of 2001, a project group consisting of 12 members from throughout the organisation (10 men and 2 women, all from white collar professions) was established with the aim of filtering out which corporate values Company X wanted to have. Based on the results of the interviews with the top management and the top management workshop, the project group came up with four core values they thought all employees at Company X could share. These values were then later discussed and scrutinised in the autumn of 2001 by 12 focus groups. The focus groups consisted of 150 participants of both genders from throughout the organisation, from all hierarchic levels, and from the six biggest national representations within the organization. After concluding the work of the focus groups, the four final corporate values were decided by the corporate executive board in February 2002. The proposed values included the following:

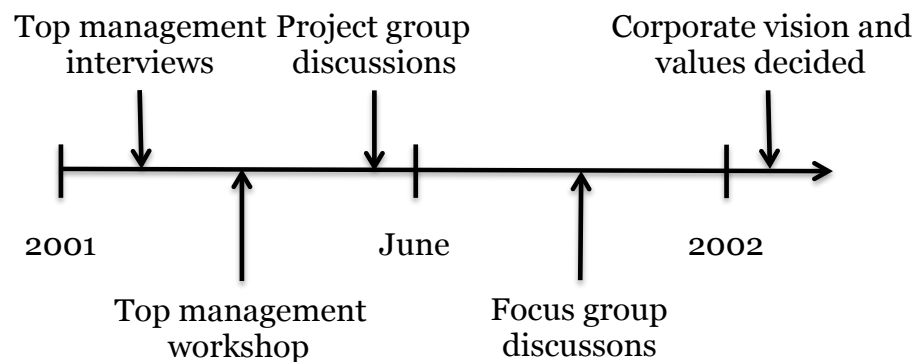
1. We have no barriers
2. We mean what we say, we do what we say

3. We encourage people to reach their full potential
4. We respect each other

Company X's proposed vision was formulated as the following six core business ideas:

1. We add value to our customers
2. We aim to be a differentiated supplier
3. We focus on fine coated magazine papers, consumer packaging, and merchandising
4. We create innovative products and services
5. We maintain and improve our cost efficiency
6. We have skilled and competent people

The time course for establishing the core vision and values within the project group that top management hoped all employees at Company X could share is shown in Figure 5.



*Figure 5. Company X's path toward common vision and values as decided upon by the corporate executive board in February 2002*

#### ***4.2.1 CC-project employee communication***

During the spring and summer of 2002, the Consultant Firm in close cooperation with the project group created an introduction package consisting of the following:

- a value presentation set (a PowerPoint presentation explaining the aim of the project)
- a set of arguments to use when presenting the project
- the first internal bulletin to be presented

The introduction package was first tested on two employee groups before it was distributed within the organisation.

Finally, in the autumn of 2002 the first introduction of the proposed values among the employees started. The aim was that all employees should participate in a four-hour introduction seminar with discussions about the values and to operationalize them into the company's strategies before March 2003. During this process, the project was described several times in the company magazine and internal bulletins were published on the company intranet from time to time.

## 5 Methodology and research material

### 5.1 Prologue

I have more than 18 years of experience starting in one of the companies that is now part of Company X. I started working as a project engineer in 1989 and after five years changed positions and became responsible for environmental communications. I held that position throughout the years of the M&A processes analysed in this study. After two years of Master's degree studies on organisational communication, I went back to Company X and became responsible for corporate responsibility communications as well as working as the CC-project coordinator. The CC-project had the aim of creating a unified company, “...one Company X” (facilitator guide, 2002), out of five large companies and almost 22 000 employees and was the focus of this thesis. Because this study and the interpretation of the collected data material are influenced by my personal values and experiences, it is important to describe my own background especially because the subject of this study used to be my own workplace.

#### 5.1.1 Halfie research

Halfie research can be understood as “...research conducted by a researcher who comes from the culture she studies, but who, during the work, is a member of another culture, that ‘commissioned’ the research project” (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1998:4). As a halfie, I might end up in the position of having problems maintaining a professional distance to what I observe. At the same time, however, I have a deep knowledge about the company and a lot of experience with the issues I am discussing. Being a halfie researcher I am guided by the notion that I always have to bear in mind my former position in the company versus my role as a researcher when making my analyses.

In this chapter I will describe how I, from a methodology point of view, have conducted this study in terms of material and methods used as well as the research design based on the critical realism approach.



## **5.2 Methodology**

The overall purpose of this study is to describe and analyse top management's use and the employees' perception and understanding of change communication practices in a culture change process during a major M&A. With critical realism and Aastrup's (2000) change network model guiding me in the analysis, I will not only try to describe what kind of change process I observed through the empirical reality but also try to explain the realities that were not visible. This will be done through identifying the role of structural factors (the culture(s) of the organisation) on human agency (employees and top management in the organisation) and in generating practices (events and processes within the boundaries of the organisation). Based on the process influences of Aastrup's network model (2000), a process methodology choice is appropriate because process research focuses on understanding how things evolve over time and why they evolve in this way (Langley, 1999). The how question is about defining the course of the process, and the why question is about deciding what action has led to what event (Langley, 1999). The process approach is suitable, therefore, when engaging in a change process oriented type of study.

The process approach is used in connection with the view that organisational culture is something that the organisation is. Scott Pool et al (2000:36) described the process approach as containing entities that participate in events that might change over time and that the time line of independent events is critical. The process approach focuses on the context of the connection between cause and effect and is concerned with explaining how outcomes develop over time (Markus & Robey, 1988).

Andrew Van de Ven and Poole (2005) created a typology of approaches for studying organisational change based on ontological and epistemological underpinnings (Table 7). In their model, they viewed the ontology of organisations as consisting of static things described as nouns and emergent processes described as verbs and viewed epistemologies as variances or process approaches.

Table 7. Typology of approaches for studying organisational change according to Van de Ven and Poole (2005)

Epistemology	Ontology	
	A noun, a social actor, a real entity (thing)	A verb, a process of organizing, an emergent flux
	Variance approach	Process approach
	<p><i>Approach 1</i></p> <p>Variance studies of change in organisational entities by causal analysis of independent variables that explain changes in the entity</p>	<p><i>Approach 4</i></p> <p>Variance studies of organising by dynamic modelling of agent-based models or chaotic complex adaptive systems</p>
	<p><i>Approach 2</i></p> <p>Process studies of change in organisational entities narrating sequences of events, stages, or cycles of change in the development of an entity</p>	<p><i>Approach 3</i></p> <p>Process studies of organising by narrating emergent actions and activities by which collective endeavours unfold</p>

Based on the facts that I see organisations as constantly changing and that I am interested in post-M&A change processes, the approach used in this study will be Approach 3 presented by Van de Ven and Pool (2005) (Table 7). Approach 3 presumes that the world is composed of emergent actions and activities by which collective endeavours unfold. Time is essential in this approach in terms of how processes unfold over time and this approach allows me to map changes in this study longitudinally. This approach typically uses qualitative data from multiple sources, but it does include quantitative data if applicable. Data collection is in real-time settings as well as retrospective analyses and is usually focused on one or a few cases, which is also in line with the research design of this study.

### 5.3 Research design

In this section I will describe the research design and practical realisation of this study. From a critical realism viewpoint, quantitative and qualitative research are seen as individually limiting and so the use of both approaches is encouraged (Danemark, 2003; Wright, 2010) and this is also in line with Approach 3 (Van de Ven & Poole, 2005). From the critical realism viewpoint, reality is stratified and it is, therefore, necessary to gather data from as many sources as possible to avoid focusing only on the empirical reality (Wright, 2010). John Mingers, (2000:12) argues that “critical realism is essentially pluralist since it legitimates both extensive methods such as statistical data analysis and intensive methods such as interviewing, case studies, or participant observation”. Consequently, I used a mixture of qualitative and semi-qualitative methods that is described as the mixed method approach

(Martin, 2002). In this study, the data collection was composed of the following three substudies:

1. A document compilation of written material in conjunction with the CC-project within Company X.
2. An interview study conducted with top management, middle management, and employees during the introduction phase of the CC-project.
3. A questionnaire aimed at finding out how the CC-project process was kept alive and at evaluating the employees' understanding of the values in the units two years after the introduction of the CC project.

It might have been valuable to study the Consultant Firm's work prior to the introduction of the CC-project. Because this study was focused on the post-merger phase, the culture change process, and the communication practices among top management and employees after the introduction of the CC-project, however, the study of the Consultant Firm and their work was outside the scope of this thesis.

### **5.3.1 Research time span**

Because this study was carried out as three separate substudies, both in terms of when the data was collected and the methods of analyses used, it is valuable to present the research time span that began in 2002 and ended in 2004 and this is shown in Table 8. The empirical material might be considered relatively old, but it is far from out of date. Company X's situation and its cultural change process is relevant today because the world of businesses never stops with M&As, and change processes such as the CC-project are still very common. The change communication practices used in a culture change process such as the CC-project are still in need of more thorough studies in relation to the areas that I cover in this study, including the change communication methods used in change processes on a general level (Lewis, 2007) and a lack of studies analysing the role of employees' attitudes toward organisational change (Choi, 2011).

The compilation of written material in conjunction with the CC-project started in 2002 and the data collection ended early in 2003. The interviews were conducted in 2002 both before and during the introduction of the common vision and values to the employees. The material from the questionnaires was collected in 2004. Table 8 presents the three substudies together with important events happening throughout the change process.

Table 8. The three substudies in this thesis presented together with important events in the CC-project

Year	Important event	Substudy		
		1	2	3
		Document compilation	Interviews	Questionnaire
2001	Value selection process starts with interviews with top management  (a more detailed description of this year is presented in page 44, Figure 5, Chapter 4)			
2002	Corporate values decided on and communicated  Introduction to employees starts			
2003	CC-project ends Post-CC period starts			
2004	Post-CC period			

### 5.3.2 Mixed method approach

The first substudy, the document compilation, used a classical rhetoric analysis but included elements from modern rhetoric analysis that incorporate an analysis of context. I have also added some tables in the rhetoric analyses when analysing the arguments. For the second substudy, the in-depth interviews with some quantitative elements included in the analysis, a qualitative content analysis was chosen. In the third substudy, I used a questionnaire that included both open and closed questions and the results of the questionnaire were analysed according to a semi-qualitative content analysis. Table 9 shows the connections between the theory-driven aspects (the three analytical aspects central to the understanding of a culture change process and change communication practices including the role of culture, top management's use of change communication methods, and

employee perception and understanding of change processes), the three substudies, and the empirical material.

*Table 9. The theory-driven aspects connected to the three substudies and the empirical material*

Sub-study	Empirical material		Theory-driven aspects		
	Data collection methods	Methods of analysis	A The role of culture	B Change com. methods	C Employee perception & understanding
1	Document compilation	Rhetoric analysis	X	X	
2	Interviews	Qualitative content analysis	X	X	X
3	Questionnaire	Semi-qualitative content analysis	X		X

### **5.3.3 Analyses and presentation of the empirical material**

In the next sections (5.4, 5.5, and 5.6), I will describe how the empirical material in each of the three substudies was collected and analysed. I will also describe in what form the analysed empirical material will be presented and where. The order of the presentation of the three substudies will follow the longitudinal perspective (see Table 9) starting with substudy one (the compiled documents) and ending with substudy three (the questionnaire).

The three theory-driven aspects in Table 9; role of culture, top management's use of change communication methods, and employee perception and understanding, will be further analysed and discussed in Chapter 9.

## **5.4 Substudy one – document compilation**

### **5.4.1 Data collection**

In the first substudy, I compiled documents that would provide an understanding of the top management's use of change communication methods. The data collection was focused on the following written material associated with the CC-project within Company X:

- internal bulletins
- intranet messages

- articles in the internal magazine published by Company X on a corporate level, called the Internal Magazine, and internal magazines published on local level
- presentations at meetings
- CC-project material consisting of the facilitation and learning guide (56 pages) and 4 work sheets, called work mats by Company X

To capture top management's change communication methods and rhetoric, I decided to analyse the internal bulletin (published in March 2002), the facilitation and learning guide, and the 4 work mats. To get a broader picture of the practices used, I also decided to analyse three typical articles out of five that had been published in Internal Magazine. Analysing the last two articles would not have contributed with any new information because they discussed similar issues as the three chosen articles and used the same content approach. With the exception of the facilitator guide, which was written to guide the chosen facilitators on how to conduct the CC-project sessions, all material was aimed at all of Company X's employees. The guide and work mats were written by the Consultant Firm in close cooperation with the top management of Company X, and the articles and the internal bulletin were written by employees in the communications department on behalf of top management. Both the internal bulletin and the articles were written as a source of information about the process while the guide gave instructions to the facilitators as to what to say, when to say it, and in what order.

#### **5.4.2 Analysis**

I chose to analyse the collected data using the rhetoric model of Bo Renberg (2007), which itself is based on the Maria Karlberg and Brigitte Mral (1998) rhetoric analysis model for analysing advertisements. This model allowed me to analyse the kinds of rhetoric and arguments used throughout the introduction process by the top management in Company X. This analytical method is a combination of classical rhetoric and the new rhetoric that includes context as part of the model (Table 10).

Table 10. Presentation of Renberg's (2007) rhetoric model inspired by the Karlberg and Mral rhetoric analysis model (1998)

Analysis steps		
<b>Purpose of the text</b>	sender- (what are the motives?) subject- (what do the words say?) receiver- (how was the text interpreted?)	
<b>Context</b>	Rhetorical genre	<i>Genus judiciale</i> , the legal type of speech <i>Genus deliberativum</i> , the deliberate type of speech <i>Genus demonstrativum</i> , generally entertaining type of speech
	The rhetorical situation	Outer surrounding terms affecting the communication such as time, space, situation, etc.
	Public	The receivers' attitudes, expectations, statuses, roles, and functions are taken into account.
	The rhetorical problem	The clash of opinion/opposition that might be the reason for giving the speech
	Speaker/author	Who is the sender of the message?
<b>Disposition</b>	introduction (exordium) background (narration) thesis (proposition) argumentation (argumentario) conclusion (conclusion/peroration)	
<b>Means for argumentation</b>	trustworthiness (ethos) convincing arguments (logos) emotional affect (pathos)	
<b>Argumentation</b>	Main message Supportive message	
<b>Style</b>	type of style used (high, normal, or low) metaphors and narratives	

Renberg's model (2007) is used because of its connection to context and its clear structure. By dealing with the context as well as the text itself, such an analysis provides a deeper understanding of which rhetorically focused change communication methods were used. The steps in the analyses included determining the purpose of the text, the context (including the

choice of genre, the rhetorical situation, public, the rhetorical problem, and the speaker/author), the disposition, the means for argumentation, the specific type of argumentation used, and type of style used.

The arguments found in the texts were classified according to classical rhetoric into logos, pathos, and ethos arguments. Ethos refers to the character or trustworthiness of the speaker/writer, pathos refers to convincing through the use of emotions, and logos is achieved via the use of logical arguments (Aristotle, 1991). In Table 11, I have further developed what each of the argument categories contains in my specific study and what my analyses are based on as compiled from Karlberg and Mral (1998) and Kriistina Volmari (2009).

*Table 11. Examples of arguments connected to logos, pathos and ethos, compiled from Karlberg and Mral (1998) and Volmari (2009)*

<i>Logos</i>	<i>Pathos</i>	<i>Ethos</i>
Facts and statistics	We/Our-based arguments	Repetition of arguments
Definition of terms	Personal anecdotes and stories	Trustworthiness
Explanation of ideas	The use of metaphors	Use of credible sources
Cause and effect	Stories or testimonials	Knowledge
Logical reasons and explanations	Appeal to emotions	Experience and authority
Objective reporting	Subjective reporting	Appropriate language and tone
Quotations		Ethics

Logos refers to argumentation based on the facts presented in the text or speech. Karlberg and Mral (1998) also see logos as a deliberate rhetorical device in which the sender uses logic, rationality, and critical reasoning in the argumentation to convince the receiver. Logos arguments appeal to the reader's reasoning and intellect and, according to Volmari (2009), quotations are frequently used to give an air of objectivity. The argumentations in logos arguments is often based on facts, such as statistics and figures, generalisations, and expertise. Pathos arguments appeal to emotions. The argumentation in pathos arguments is often based on metaphors, pictures, and memories (Karlberg & Mral, 1998). Ethos arguments appeal to ethics and character and are often based on knowledge, authority, and experience. They can also be based on the authority of the writer or speaker or another expert. Furthermore, ethos arguments can be based on the writer's role to which he expresses commitment (Karlberg &



Mral, 1998). Ethos arguments attempt to convince through the use of credibility and trustworthiness.

### **5.4.3 *Presentation***

I have used Renberg's (2007) rhetoric model and its vocabularies as a basis for the presentation of the rhetoric analysis. The compiled documents, and my analyses of them, will be described and analysed in Chapter 6. I will present the analysed data according to my two first research questions where the first part, an analysis of the communication plan, is connected to research question one and the second part, an analysis of written material in conjunction with the CC-project, is connected to research question two.

## **5.5 Substudy two – interviews**

### **5.5.1 *Data collection***

In order to understand the role of culture in a change process, I conducted in-depth and semi-structured interviews during the start-up phase of the introduction of the CC-project. When collecting empirical data aiming at capturing the different parts of an organisation, in this case the role of culture, one must take into account a variety of concepts such as nationality, gender, race, profession, age, hierarchical level, and religion (Martin, 2002). Five countries, eight units, and a mix of genders and positions in the company were covered in the interviews, and a total of 23 individuals were interviewed (Table 12). The five countries chosen were the ones with the largest number of employees. Two units were chosen from the corporate departments, business areas, production units, and sales offices. To simplify the process, the top manager of each unit helped me to choose the informants according to a hierarchic order. Six of the 23 informants were women (24% in all). All informants were contacted before the interview and gave informed consent.

Table 12. Place and position of the informants in the interview guide

Units			Hierarchical levels		
			Top	Middle	Low
<i>Corporate departments</i>	Operations and sourcing	Finland	X	X, X	-
	Corporate communications	International	X	X	X
<i>Business areas</i>	Home and office	International	X	X	X
	Consumer packaging	Finland	X	X	X
<i>Production</i>	Swedish mill	Sweden	X	X	-
	French mill	France	-	X, X	-
<i>Sales</i>	London office	England	X	X	X
	Hamburg office	Germany	-	X, X	X, X
Number of informants			6	11	6

The interview guide was designed solely by me with no interference from top management and with no connection to my former employment. The questions asked were regarding the informants' views of the company, the hierarchic systems within the company, and their own as well as others' cultural behaviour (see Appendix 1). Questions about the company in general were also included. All interviews but one were conducted in the informant's office or in a conference room. All interviews were conducted in private and in English except for one where an interpreter was needed. The interviews took one to two hours mostly depending on the time the informant could spend on the interview. During the interviews I used a tape recorder and also took notes.

### 5.5.2 Analysis

The interviews were transcribed from the recordings and notes, summarised, and analysed according to the illustrative method of qualitative content analysis (Patel & Tibelius, 1987). The illustrative method is descriptive in its nature and combines the qualitative qualities of the interview answers with an arrangement of the answers into themes following a word-based structure. According to Approach 3 in the Van de Ven and Poole (2005) typology, such a word-based structure could include the view on time, the view on the hierarchy, sense-making, and the understanding of organizing. My word-based structure in the analysis was divided into the following four categories: the informant's view on their own and other's nationality, their view on unit affiliation, their view on the company's hierarchy, and their understanding of the organisation.

### **5.5.3 Presentation**

The analysis of the interviews is presented in Chapter 7. It is important to note that the stories told by the informants are not intended to represent the facts of what happened but are merely representing how they made sense of the change process (cf., Weick, 1995). In order to cover all of the informants' multiple perceptions and interpretations of their own situations within the start-up phase of the CC-project, I have structured the presentation according to the view on organisational culture found in the literature and compiled by Martin and Meyerson (1987, 1988). This view on organisational structure includes the three themes of integration, diversity, and ambiguity.

## **5.6 Substudy three – the questionnaire**

### **5.6.1 Data collection**

In order to identify the employees' understanding of the results of the CC-project two years after the end of the project, a questionnaire was used as the data collection method. A questionnaire was chosen instead of a qualitative interview study so as to gather responses from a larger group of informants. The questionnaire included both open and closed questions and was sent out via e-mail to a selected group of employees throughout the company. The choice of informants was made in order to cover those employees who were most involved in the introduction process, namely the Human Resources (HR) managers, internal communicators, and the CC facilitators consisting of both white- and blue-collar employees.

The intention with the questionnaire was to cover how the post-CC process was kept alive and the response to the proposed vision and values among the employees at the units. The questions asked focused on how the employees' lived the values and this made it possible to take a semi-qualitative approach to the data.

The 105 employees sent a questionnaire were of both genders, came from all countries and units within Company X, and were from three different employment categories.

1. Countries: Finland, France, German-speaking countries (German, Austria and Switzerland), Sweden, the UK and Other countries.
2. Units: Mill, Sales, Staff, and Merchant Group

### 3. Profession: HR managers, Internal communicators, CC facilitators

The informants were contacted via e-mail with the questionnaire attached as a file and were sent a single reminder if they did not respond. The response rate was 69 %. In total, 72 questionnaires were returned but some respondents did not answer all the questions in the questionnaire. The number of responses according to the different categories is presented in Table 13.

*Table 13. Responses connected to the different categories of employees in the questionnaire*

	<b>Number contacted (Total)</b>	<b>Response rate (%)</b>	<b>Number responding</b>
Connected to profession			
HR-managers	34	74	26
Internal communicators	24	62	15
CC-facilitators	47	66	31
<i>Total number:</i>	<i>105</i>	<i>69</i>	<i>72</i>
Connected to countries			
Finland	37	68	25
France	6	100	6
German-speaking countries	16	56	9
Other countries/International	26	80	21
Sweden	13	54	7
UK	8	50	4
<i>Total number:</i>	<i>105</i>	<i>69</i>	<i>72</i>

The questionnaire consisted of nine questions (Appendix 2). The questions referred to how the informants perceived the CC-project and how they viewed the proposed common vision and values, how they perceived living the values, and the challenges connected to living the values two years later. The questions were asked in English and all of the answers were given in English.

#### **5.6.2 Analysis**

The answers were treated anonymously, summarised, and categorised according to unit, profession, and country. The analysis was performed according to the illustrative method of semi-qualitative content analysis (Patel & Tibelius, 1987). The word-based structure (according to Van de Ven & Poole, 2005, typology) in this case was developed in two phases. The

responses were first categorized according to whether they were negative, neutral, or positive responses and then within each of these three categories, the comments were categorized as to whether they were associated with communication, culture, coordination, or cooperation.

### **5.6.3 Presentation**

It is important to note when reading the responses and quotations from the informants that these were given in English, even though English was not the native language for most of the informants. Their responses have not been edited so as to retain their original voice and to avoid altering their meaning.

The analysis of the questionnaire will be presented in Chapter 8. The presentation of the analysis is connected to the second part of research question three, the employees' understanding of the results of the CC project two years later, and is presented in two parts: how the informants' perceived the situation at the time of the questionnaire and their understanding of how the process should continue.

## **5.7 Analyses of empirical material and critical realism**

Aastrup's (2000) network model and the definitions within it (such as agency, actions, practices, and structures) will be used throughout the analyses of the results. For a more thorough presentation of the model, see Chapter 2, page 13.

A main part in analyses from a critical realism perspective is the concept of retrodution (Mingers, 2000; Wright, 2010). Easton (2010:123) explains that "*retrodution means 'moving backwards' and that is what the process involves*". Retroductive analysis involves reflection and looking for relations between what is observed in the empirical domain and redirecting this toward the actual domain, and, if possible, the real domain, by proposing hypothetical mechanisms or structures that, if they existed, would generate or cause that which is to be explained (Mingers, 2000, Wright, 2010). Mingers (ibid) defines the structure to be physical, social, or psychological and emphasises that structure might not be directly visible except in terms of the effects it causes that are observable in the empirical domain.

Danemark et al (2003) and Wright (2010) argue that, as a researcher operating from a critical realism perspective, it is import to constantly view the world with a conscious attempt to consider unseen causal mechanisms that are either generated by structure/culture or by agency. Wright (2010) also suggests that during the analysis the researcher should try to analyse the

different entities; structure/culture and agency, separately before connecting them because they represent different domains of reality and are able to generate unique events by themselves. The individual effects could be easily missed if the two entities are analysed together. Furthermore, as a critical realist researcher it is of vital importance to remain constantly reflective about what could be occurring beneath the empirical reality.

## **6 Substudy one – Document compilation**

Change communication in a culture change process must consider several factors in order to be successful. These factors are knowledge about the existing organisational culture(s), a well planned strategic communication, the use of various change communication methods such as formally constructed communication and rhetoric, and the use of activities involved in the change process such as seminars, meetings, articles, and bulletins. In this chapter, I will present the strategic communication choices made by Company X found in both the communication plan and in the written material connected to the CC-project.

The agency referred to in this chapter is top management. This means that I refer to them as the person(s) who are intentionally causing an event within the structure, which in this case is the organisational culture(s) and top managements' hierarchical position and power. Tony Lawson (1997) emphasises that behind human practice (meaning the material and social framework that connects human agency with each other) lies the intentionality and the choices made where choice refers to the power of agency to act in any situation. By attributing intentionality to actions, attention is directed toward the reasons causing action. In this chapter, it is interesting to consider the reason(s), and especially the practice connected to the reasons, behind the actions of the agency (top management and employees). Practices that are observable in the empirical domain in this case include the communication plan and the written material connected to the CC-project.

### **6.1 Communication plan**

A strategic communication plan for the CC-project was prepared by the Consultant Firm in close cooperation with the project group (Table 14). The CC-project communication plan describes the different communication activities employed in the process, the time span, and which communication channels to use.

The aim of the first section of the communication plan, referred to as the cool phase, was to inform and raise interest about the proposed common vision and values. The communication channels used in this part of the plan were both company-wide and unit-specific, and the majority of the information was given in the Internal Magazine. The second section of the communication plan, referred to as the warm phase, coincided with the

introduction of the CC-project to the employees via the introduction seminars about the proposed common vision and values. In this phase, managers' visibility was emphasised in regular meetings as well as in the introduction seminars. Articles in the Internal Magazine during this phase focused on activities connected to the CC-project rather than on introducing and explaining the meaning of the proposed common vision and values.

The strategic communication plan could be considered to belong to the category that views communication as a tool for change (the top-down view on change communication). This is partly because of the use of company-wide communication channels (the Internal Magazine, internal bulletin, and intranet) that left little possibility for feedback from the employees and a presentation material that focused primarily on top managers' communication at meetings, and partly in the way that the top management's 'walk-around' was conducted. The top management 'walk-around', which was emphasised in the communication plan, restrained itself to one meeting per unit. This was normally the first introduction seminar at each unit that was visited by one top management member. In the other seminars at each unit, only the unit manager participated and this was mostly only for the first hour of the seminar.

The Falkheimer and Heide (2007) view on strategic communication is, among other things, that it should support the organisation's culture or identity. The strategic communication plan put forth by Company X, however, mainly presented the vision and values but did not put them into a context such as the employees' day-to-day reality. The only exceptions to this were the three articles in the internal magazine that discussed the values in connection to production units and how the units worked with the introduction of the common vision and values. Organisational culture(s) is created and recreated in the constant communication between the members of the organisation, and merely being told to change, as was the case in Company X, does not guarantee a change. Little in this communication plan was directed towards dialogue and discussion to facilitate an understanding of the meaning behind the introduced values. The only activity directed towards dialogue was the four-hour introduction seminar.

The limited time span of the CC-project communication plan, including a clear start and stop date, indicates that Company X took a project view of the change process rather than a process view – there were no plans for future activities connected to the CC-project. When the CC-project was completed after 18 months, the top management of Company X probably thought that the introduction of the proposed common vision and values had been accomplished.



Table 14. Company X's CC project communication plan

Time	January – March 2002	March – September 2002	September 2002– 2003
Communication activities and channels	<i>'Cool phase' communications</i> <i>"To inform, raise interest"</i>		<i>'Warm' phase</i> <i>"To involve in action"</i>
Companywide media and actions	Internal bulletin	Introduction pack to mill management, sales unit management, and business area management  Intranet – to make a folder with all material to date	Top management walk-around  Intranet – increased information about the CC-project, Q&A etc.
Internal Magazine		Internal Magazine 2/02 Internal Magazine 3/02 Internal Magazine 4/02	Internal Magazine 6/02  Internal Magazine 3/03
Local media and actions	Presentations about the project at management meetings	Presentations at any major meeting Local magazine and local intranet articles	Management (both top- and middle-management) walk-around Introduction seminars Local magazines/newsletters

## 6.2 Written material used in the rhetoric analysis

The material presented here is the written material within the Company X organisational framework associated with the CC-project. It consists of an internal bulletin, articles in the Internal Magazine, and the CC-project material. The sender of all the material was management, mostly top managers but middle managers as well, sometimes directly and sometimes indirectly through others.

### 6.2.1 Internal Bulletin

A two-page, A4-size document with no photos was the first text published about the CC-project in March 2002. The document was published on the intranet and put up on notice boards throughout the company. It was directed towards all employees and informed them about the CC-project and why it was needed.

### **6.2.2 Internal Magazine**

All three articles that were analysed were part of a series in the Internal Magazine that was intended to introduce the CC-project. The Internal Magazine was published six times a year, was 28 pages long, and informed about things such as different business areas, interesting employees, and departmental information. All employees received the magazine published in several languages, among them English, Finnish, Swedish, German, and French. The three articles analysed cover more than a year in time, from the first published article in 2002 to the last in 2004. In the first article, the HR President (the founder of the CC-project and representing top management) wrote about the newly introduced common values and argued for their necessity. The second article dealt with the value 'we encourage people to reach their full potential' and presented Company X employees, their views on the CC-project, and how their potential as employees could be developed. Finally, the third article presented some of the persons in charge of the introduction seminars (the facilitators) at the different production units and how the newly introduced values were applied and used in two specific units giving examples on how it was done.

### **6.2.3 Facilitator guide and work mats**

The main purpose of the facilitator guide was to give the facilitators guidelines so that they could carry out the introduction seminars in accordance with the CC-project's objectives. The facilitator guide and work mats were developed "*with the objective of reaching each and every one of our people to help them understand Company X's new values and Core Business ideas and how they support our vision*" (Facilitator guide:3). However, there was no vision presented anywhere in the analysed material, only six core business ideas. The main part of the text in the facilitator guide consisted of reasons for having common vision and values to be presented at the introduction seminars by the facilitators "*our values represent 'the way we do things around here' – the very core of the way we behave*" (Facilitator guide:47). Again, this is an interesting quotation that implies a view among top management, and especially the CEO who is the sender of the facilitator guide, that the values were already in place. The signals sent to the employees who were about to participate in the introduction seminars were that they were to simply accept and follow the proposed values. On the other hand, the facilitator guide encouraged the facilitators to activate the participants and involve them in the discussion and to encourage them to express their own thoughts and ideas about the proposed common vision and values. The facilitators were all chosen by the heads of each of the different units and departments and were most likely relatively positive about the CC-project and its objectives.

Four work mats (in A2 size) were used in the introduction seminars as material for the discussions. They were aimed at all the employees in Company X and were to be used in order from mat 1 to mat 4. The mats were titled 'Our Challenge', 'Our Future', 'Our Values', and 'The Way We Do Things Around Here'. Considering the size of the work mats, very little text was written on them and they mainly consisted of photographs of smiling people or photographs with connections to the headings on each mat. The photographs were all chosen by the Consultant Firm from a set of stock photographs and had nothing to do with Company X.

*Work mat 1* (Our Challenge) described four big challenges that Company X was said to face, and the participants were asked to connect them to their own departments. The challenges were new competitors, markets and technologies combined with industry consolidation, globalisation, and changing customer behaviour.

*Work mat 2* (Our Future) presented the vision in terms of the following six Company X core business ideas: 1) we add value to our customers, 2) we aim to be a differentiated supplier, 3) we focus on fine paper coated magazine papers, consumer packaging, and merchandising, 4) we create innovative products and services, 5) we maintain and improve our cost efficiency, and 6) we have skilled and competent people. No specific vision statement was presented.

*Work mat 3* (Our Values) comprised 24 value proposition cards connected to the four proposed values. Each value card was connected to one value and consisted of a statement on both sides. For example, statements connected to a card associated with the value 'we mean what we say, we do what we say' said on one side, "*we make sure that we do not say one thing and do another*", and on the other side "*we do what we need to do to deliver a good customer experience depending on the circumstances in each case*". The participants' role was then to talk about the statements and decide which one they considered being the one most in line with the meaning of the value proposition. When the entire set of cards was laid out and all the choices had been made, if the cards had been put in the intended order, meaning the correct answers were chosen according to Company X's interpretation of the values, the cards fit together like a jigsaw puzzle and created a message.

*Work mat 4* (The Way We Do Things Around Here) used eight different cases connected to everyday situations that occur between Company X and its customers, partners, and suppliers. The participants' task was to discuss and choose how to react according to the proposed values and to connect the proposed values to the different situations. The proposed values were

intended to guide the participants in their choice of how to react in each case.

### 6.3 Strategic communication and rhetoric used in the written material

The rhetorical problem the company faced was that after years of M&As, Company X wanted to create a feeling of sameness and, therefore, planned to introduce common values with the aim of creating a unified company. The first paragraph in the internal bulletin (the first published text about the CC-project to reach the employees) presented the company situation at that moment “*we have grown dramatically in our core business /.../, we are now a very international company, we have a number of projects underway.//...// We also have a new company name/.../, we have a combination of different company and national cultures and sets of values*”. Further down in the text it says, “*our aim is to become one company, one Company X*”, implying that the current situation is far from “*one Company X*” and hinting that something needs to be done. The action taken was to introduce a set of common values that would be aiming at “*... giving a common compass-direction for all employees, at building a more people-oriented leadership culture and work atmosphere and at supporting our vision and strategy*” (Internal bulletin). With this, the CC-project was launched with the aim of creating a unified company. In this chapter, I will analyse and discuss the means of arguments found in the published texts and what types of rhetorical devices were used and how they reinforced the message of the arguments.

#### 6.3.1 Logic, emotions, and credibility in equal parts

When analysing the arguments found in the material, the division between the use of logos, ethos, and pathos is rather even (Table 15).

Table 15. Number of arguments categorized according to the classical rhetoric

Type of argument	Example	Number
Logos	“...which aims at communicating the background and explaining what the values really mean in everyday work life” (Internal bulletin)	20
Ethos	“There are no right or wrong answers. What you think is important” (Internal magazine 02-6)	17
Pathos	“The ‘we’ spirit will be stronger” (Internal magazine 02-2)	19
Total		56

Company X's use of arguments could be compared with Volmari's (2009) study of the Finnish forest industries' use of rhetoric over a period of almost half a century in which she found a clear focus on the use of logos arguments. She studied the rhetoric used in their customer magazines where a clear communication focus was sales and the main arguments used were logos arguments appealing to reasoning and intellect and convincing with statistics and facts. However, in a situation like Company X's, where the aim of the project was to create a unified company, an assumption would be that the company would favour the use of ethos and pathos argument when communicating about values and trying to enhance the company's credibility.

The logos argument in this material was mostly used as a guiding compass by telling the employees what the proposed common vision and values were all about, as in *"it's about understanding where we are going and how we are going to get there"* (Facilitator guide). These arguments were often more concrete in their content and more closely related to the day-to-day reality of the employees compared to the ethos and pathos arguments such as *"all individual actions are equally important and their progress and results should be fed back to all employees in the same way CC-project communications were originally made"* (Internal magazine, 03-3). It is with the logos arguments that Company X illustrated how to progress with the internal as well as external work and where the connection to the six core business ideas was the most obvious.

The ethos arguments reinforced the picture that Company X was taking the CC-project seriously and that creating the values was not just a top-management product. A typical example was, *"It is important to know that Company X's values are not something that management came up with during a conference somewhere, nor are they something that an external agency invented"* (Internal Magazine, 02-2). Anti-arguments were also used such as *"... it is no secret that such projects fail at many companies. Yet, Senior Vice President HR worked with a similar project, which was successful at the company he previously worked for..."* (Internal Magazine, 02-2). By using anti-arguments, Company X displayed an understanding of the difficulties the CC-project was facing while at the same time showing confidence that the result of the work would be successful. The use of ethos arguments in the texts is understandable because Company X needed credibility in arguing for a unified company as well as the process of choosing the values.

Pathos arguments supported the explanatory logos arguments, and more visionary statements such as, *"...it is vital that we have a vision of what we want to be, and a clear, yet flexible, plan of how we will get there"* (Work mat) were

common. The use of the pathos-inspired ‘we’ in the arguments can be considered a way for Company X to create a feeling of belonging; ‘we are in this together’, and with the newly introduced values Company X and its employees would obtain a better and nicer workplace “*there is a clear link between the view that we could be doing better on ‘skilled and competent people’ and the fact that this is the top priority across all departments*” (Internal magazine 03-3). The use of pathos in these arguments was painting a picture of a visionary company that cared for its employees and was full of trust in a successful future. However, very little in the arguments connected to the day-to-day life of the employees and they seldom gave concrete examples of what the newly introduced proposed values actually represented.

### **6.3.2 The same type of arguments, over and over again**

Many of the arguments given in the texts reappeared in the same text material as well as in different texts. These appeared mostly with the same wordings but sometimes with different words but with the same meaning. In order to single out the most common arguments used, I have categorised the arguments into seven categories, five with a meaning, one called anti-arguments and one category for those that do not fit into any of the others. The categories are:

1. A unified company
2. What the value represents
3. Credibility
4. Employee focus
5. How to meet the needs of the future
6. Anti-argument
7. Other

In Table 16, I present the categories with a quotation connected to each category. I have further connected them to the classical rhetoric.

Table 16. A summary of the most common arguments found in the text

Type of argument	Example	Logos	Ethos	Pathos	Total
A unified company	<i>"Our aim is to become one company, one Company X"</i> (Internal bulletin)	-	-	2	2
The value represents	<i>"Our values represent 'the way we do things around here' – the very core of the way we behave"</i> (Facilitator guide)	2	-	8	10
Credibility	<i>"An intensive effort over the past year to define Company X values has involved nearly 150 people within the company, representing all organisation levels and all countries"</i> (Internal magazine 02-2)	1	4	-	5
Employee focus	<i>"... bringing out untapped potential among Company X employees"</i> (Internal magazine 02-6)	2	-	2	4
How to meet the needs of the future	<i>"...to be successful in the future everyone in Company X must contribute to improving the way we work with our customers and each other"</i> (Workmat)	8	2	6	16
Anti-argument	<i>"...only time will tell if the CC-project unites the personnel and the mills operating in different countries"</i> (Internal magazine 02-6)	1	6	-	7
Other	<i>"There is a strong link between Company X's business strategy and the values – they live together"</i> (Internal magazine 02-2)	6	5	1	12
Total		20	17	19	

It is interesting to note, when looking at the arguments, that the category 'a unified company', which was the communicated reason for the existence of the CC-project, was the least common type of argument. Of all the text material analysed, I only found two arguments given in this direction and these were *"our aim is to become one company, one Company X"* (Internal Bulletin) and *"the 'we' spirit will be stronger"* (Internal magazine 02-2). Considering the fact that the CC-project was about introducing a common set of values, the lack of arguments connected to the values later on in the CC-project is noticeable. Instead, in subsequent material communicating about the CC-project, the focus was on the six core business ideas and what they meant for the company *"...keep people focused on where Company X is*

*heading and what they can do to contribute*” (Facilitator guide). The second category ‘the value represents’, where the message was directly connected to the goal of the CC-project, was one of the most frequently used categories. However, when used, it was mostly sweeping sentences filled with metaphors and visionary ideas that were seldom put forward in an explanatory way. A typical argument could be *“the corporate values are aimed at building a more people-oriented leadership culture and work atmosphere and at pointing all employees in a common direction”* (Internal Magazine 02-2). These arguments discussed what the case would be if the values would be fully introduced *“the cornerstones of our new strategy and the linkage to the values will also be an integral part of the process, and this gives us an opportunity to communicate both our values and strategy throughout the organisation”* (Internal Bulletin). The use of metaphors in the value-connected arguments was frequent and words like common compass direction, cornerstone, common direction, framework, and the very core were typical. The use of metaphors in arguments can often help in building a picture of what the writer or speaker wishes to express and in creating a feeling of community (Karlberg & Mral, 1998), but if used without connection to the readers’ everyday life it only makes the text sound shallow (von Platen, 2006). In the case of Company X and its rhetoric around the values, only one concrete argument was given *“the consensus was that values are the framework through which all issues can be approached and taken forward but that knowledge of the production chain and the markets bring perspective to one’s own work”* (Internal magazine 02-6). All the other arguments were presented in abstract words.

Those arguments aiming at credibility belong to the argument category ‘credibility’. These were mostly ethos-based and referred back to the process of choosing values and described how the process involved more persons than just the top management *“it is important to know that Company X’s values are not something that management came up with during a conference somewhere, nor are they something that an external agency invented”* (Internal Magazine 02-2). These arguments were found only in the beginning of the CC-project communication and were not referred back to later in the CC-project.

The only one of Company X’s four common values that was talked about in text (apart from when the values were presented) was ‘we encourage people to reach their full potential’. Arguments associated with this value have been categorized as ‘employee focus’ and examples of arguments connected to this category are *“... bringing out untapped potential among Company X employees, //...// The purpose of the CC-project is to encourage all Company X employees to do their best, //...// There is a lot of untapped potential, //...// If people are motivated to learn, they can most certainly learn anything”* (All from Internal Magazine 02-6). These arguments, and the wordings in them, are almost identical with the



value itself. So in the case of Company X and the development of the employee's potential, it could be argued that the message, through repetition, was clear but not how the such potential should be reached.

The arguments that occurred most were the ones discussing the core business ideas or the needs for the future of Company X and the direction in which the company should be heading *"it's about understanding where we are going and how we are going to get there"* (Facilitator guide:17). These arguments were repeated in many ways and were more concrete in their structure *"I think it is good that the company's goals are reviewed with each employee. Teamwork is a good way to pick up ideas and explore ideas together"* (Internal Magazine 02-6). Repetition was widely used in these arguments and reinforced the message by repeating it in several different phrases. According to Renberg, (2007) and Karlberg and Mral, (1998), the repetition of arguments might lead the recipient to develop a feeling of recognition of the arguments that will hopefully lead to an understanding of the speaker's/writer's intentions. Examples of such repeated phrases could be seen in the discussion of the needs of the future of Company X and the importance of how employees should act and work in their relation to customers *"...to be successful in the future everyone in Company X must contribute to improving the way we work with our customers and each other"*, *"...it is vital that we have a vision of what we want to be, and a clear, yet flexible, plan of how we will get there"*, and *"...we need to have a clear and consistent approach to the way we work with our customers, our suppliers and each other"* (Work mat 4, Work mat 2, Work mat 3, respectively). However, in the case of Company X, the arguments used were abstract and general in their character and it can be argued that the repetition of arguments, due to their abstract nature, did not create the recognition that top management was aiming for.

## 7. Substudy two - interviews

The interview study was aimed at analysing top management's, middle management's, and employees' views on the organizational cultures during the start-up phase of the CC-project and how they perceived and understood what the CC-project was all about. The agency in this chapter is top management, middle management, and the employees. The answers to the questionnaire that were analysed and discussed were related to the structure found in the real domain, which deals with the properties and perceptions that are not possible to observe physically. However, the answers were linked to the processes and events caused by the structure and mechanisms therein, and these can be found and partly observed in the actual domain and experienced in the empirical domain. The human practice (the relations between the organisation's members and the resources allocated within the organisation) in this study were especially related to the social relations between top management, middle management, and employees.

### 7.1 Integration, in the future perhaps?

The integration perspective in the Martin & Meyerson model (1987, 1988), one of the approaches on organisational culture found in their literature review, defines culture in terms of clear and consistent values, interpretations, and assumptions that are shared on an organisation-wide basis. The unified company culture approach, which the top management of Company X was aiming for, fit with the description of Martin & Meyerson's (ibid) integration perspective.

As presented in Chapter 6, the top management of Company X viewed the CC-project as a well defined project aiming at unifying the company through a shared common vision and common values. Change communication was viewed as a tool in their approach to the change process and how change should occur. The top management of Company X used the communication channels that were already established and readily available, such as the Internal Magazine and the introduction seminars, to tell the employees what to expect rather than involving the employees in a discussion about how to achieve the desired goal of a unified company. The CEO declared in the facilitator guide (5) that *"today in this CC-project session you will have an opportunity to discover the strategies and common guidelines to make us more successful, to make Company X real"*. Top management was, however, aware of the existence of old corporate cultures and the fact that it would take time for Company X to become a unified company. As one in top management (Finnish) said, *"CC will change that [the existence of old corporate cultures –*

my comment] *and create one Company X – it can take time but...*”. The reasons among top management for striving to achieve a common organizational identity, a unified company, were to become a more efficient company and develop a better work atmosphere. This was mentioned by a top management member (a Finnish informant) who said, *“what is important is that everybody needs to have an identity and then, on top of that, we do need good co-operation between the units”*. Few informants among top management, though, were of the opinion that there existed a common identity within the organisation at the time these interviews were conducted, but they did not doubt that they would eventually reach it. They thought that Company X was far too young to have reached such a level of commonality, and this was touched upon by one of the top managers who said, *“we are still not really ready with the identification work, it should work better at Company X than today”* (Finnish informant). There were, however, hopes expressed by top management that the proposed common values and their introduction would change the diversified culture of the company into a company where values were shared and followed as written in the facilitator guide (3) *“living our values in our day-to-day work will define what kind of company we really are”*. The reason why the belief in a common organization identity was so promising and created such hope at the top management level could have been a wish to overcome the problems that had arisen due to the diversified culture that existed within the company. A Swedish member of the top management said, *“especially meetings do not work well. The competence is not used well, many times due to language and cultural issues. It is difficult to express yourself in a language which is not your own”*.

The closest Company X came to experiencing an integrated company culture, according to a top manager, was among a relatively small group of people, the ‘top-hundred’, who met frequently in different projects and had little contact with the rest of the organisation. They were mainly male and Finnish and a very high percentage were over forty years old. They had a better chance to get to know each other as individuals compared with the opportunities other Company X employees had, and this created a feeling of sameness. They did not consider differences in cultural identity to be an issue, and they attributed these differences to personalities instead. They met so often that they got to know each other’s personalities and, therefore, overcame the stereotypical images that were otherwise common in the organisation. A Swedish top manager said, *“the higher up in the hierarchy, the more the personality decides the behaviour, those I communicate with is a more homogenous group and we have all worked in an international environment...”*. This group also felt that there were only a few hierarchical levels within the company, which is understandable because they were closest to the top and had significant influence over the decisions taken by the company.

## 7.2 Diversity, the situation right now?

One of the views on organisational culture found in Martin & Meyerson's (1987, 1988) literature review is called the differentiation perspective. This perspective views organisational culture as a mosaic of inconsistencies where meanings are sometimes shared but primarily only within subcultures' boundaries.

If top management at Company X experienced the beginning of, or rather a hope of, a unified company at the time of the interviews, middle management and other employees further down the hierarchical chain did not share that view. Middle management, at this point in the change process, viewed Company X organizational culture(s) according to the description of the differentiation perspective. They did not experience the embryo of a unified company like top management, but instead experienced a significant amount of irreconcilabilities and oppositions that, due to all the post M&A reorganisations within the company, had caused a lot of problems. One middle manager said, *"internally we give a shaky picture with too many changes done in too short period and we have made far too many mistakes on the way. The leadership is not considered very strong either..."* (English informant). Other responses to the issue of a diversified culture were how employees should deal with problems arising due to cultural differences *"we still have a lot of old company cultures and there is definitely a lack of a structured picture of what is applicable in this situation"* (Swedish informant, white collar).

The employees of Company X came from diverse backgrounds in terms of nationality, old company connections, professions, and gender and brought with them a melting pot of many values connected to their background. The employees' different values were not always shared or even understood by others in the company, but they guided the employees' behaviour and also formed their understanding of others in the company. The experience of others in Company X was usually related to different geographic locations and to stereotyping. Employees at the middle-management level had many contacts with employees from other units and nationalities, but usually did not have the time to get to know their colleagues well. This lack of time made it easy to be guided by stereotypical images in contacts with others rather than to interact with the individual's own personality. The following are examples of some typical stereotypes within Company X that were provided by informants during the interviews:

- Finnish employees are straight-forward and make decisions quickly...

- Swedish employees are slow in decision-making but, when taken, they are committed to them...
- German employees have a hierarchical system and do what they are expected to do...

At middle-management level, comments based on stereotyping were very common in the interviews. The following are some typical stereotypes “*Finns lack diplomacy and they are too blunt in cooperation with others*” (English informant); “*you know, they don’t always follow agreements and timetables, the French*” (German informant), and “*the Swedes always look for consensus but the decisions take a long time and sometimes they are not even taken*” (German informant). One interesting comment in connection with stereotyping and the Finnish informants view on the efficiency of Englishmen was given by a Finnish middle manager “*Finns have to teach them [Englishmen – my comment] efficiency and to change their culture*”. The notion that the English were not efficient was conveyed only by the Finnish informants, and five out of seven provided such statements.

Not many comments were given during the interviews with middle management and other employees about the change process of introducing common vision and values. When mentioned, this process was connected to the CC-project work done in their own units or to all reorganisations that had been implemented during the post-M&A period. The lack of opinions about the change process could be due to the fact that the introduction of the proposed common vision and values among the employees had just started and not all of the informants had participated in the introduction seminars. Nonetheless, some informants had grasped Company X’s change communication rhetoric advocating a unified company and the reasons behind the need of common vision and values such as uniting the company and working towards the same goal. One middle manager said, “*we do have a very loose organisation, with many different cultures involved and no real co-operation in the organisation. The changes we are facing are due to all these different cultures*” (Danish informant). The same opinion was described by a French middle manager who supported the idea of a shared vision and values and was hopeful that it would lead to something good “*we have to be better in introducing a common feeling in the company and it will be of good use to have a common set of values*”.

### **7.3 Ambiguity, a feeling of chaos?**

The view on organisational culture found in Martin & Meyerson’s (1987, 1988) literature review called the fragmentation perspective was also

represented in the interviews. The fragmentation perspective focuses predominantly on the experience and expression of ambiguity within organisational cultures and on the conflictive meanings rather than on consensus. The presence of power struggles within organisations, which according to Max Pfeffer (1978) are created by informal leadership, coalition of interests, and mixed messages from formal leadership, is one issue creating conflicting meanings that contributes to a feeling of ambiguity among employees. The internal power struggles within Company X, which according to the informants meant the presence of informal leadership, an unclear decision process and inefficient communication, was discussed in particular among the Finnish informants. A white-collar informant working in the company headquarters (HQ) said, *“the company has a really political ground, can be frustrating sometimes. It is important to prove yourself and appear in the right places if you want to be listened to. I would say that our new values are far from connected to the reality”* (Finnish informant). Informants with close connection to HQ viewed the power struggles and the ambiguity as to who was actually making the decision, and when and where, as making working life difficult and as affecting the way they handled or did not handle their tasks at work.

Risberg's (1999) findings that communication ambiguities are particularly prevalent throughout post-M&A periods was supported by Company X informants who expressed low belief in Company X's marketing efforts and were afraid that customers had mixed views on Company X's external image. The internal image of Company X was more negative than positive and was filled with ambiguity as commented by a Finnish middle manager describing the many reorganisations the company had gone through due to all the M&As *“we have a very chaotic situation where we miss common guidelines to work after and the changes in the organisation have made us lose our own control. Blue collar workers here [the unit he works in – my comments] only recognise the local culture and work according to that”*. A Swedish white-collar informant mentioned the changing situations as well and the effect that they had had on the organisation *“we are really trying to work out the co-operation between units, though, but many feel hopeless to the situation we are in right now”*. Most of the informants lower in the hierarchic chain could not even define the overall picture of Company X or why their specific unit existed *“do not really know, basically connected to the market?”* (German informant, white collar) and *“no idea!”* (English informant, white collar). Continuous reorganisation in the company made it difficult to grasp exactly where a unit belonged business-wise or where it belonged in the organisation. One middle manager described the situation by saying, *“I do not have a clue, I feel that Company X is still under construction and far from a unit”* (French informant). Some, however, regarded the reorganisations as challenging but at the same time

giving them opportunities to grow career-wise. A German informant at middle management level brought forward the notion that *“the internal situation is chaotic, but you learn to live with it, but at the same time it gives you opportunity to grow”*.

#### **7.4 The culture(s) of Company X at the beginning of the CC-project**

At the time of the interviews, the communication and introduction of the CC-project had just started and was focused on describing the reason behind the intended change (see Chapter 6). The existing cultures (in the forms of company, national, and profession cultures) were not discussed at length. If mentioned, these differences in culture were described in general terms and as a problem. The top management, being the main change agent according to Balogun et al's (2005) definition, were not aware of these differences in culture. Middle management, on the other hand, were well aware of Company X's cultural differences but was nevertheless influenced by language misunderstandings and stereotype images in their contacts with colleagues from other cultures. This in turn created misunderstandings within middle management, but these issues were not dealt with.

This notion of stereotypes is also supported by Henning Bang (1999) who claims that when subculture conflicts arise stereotype images of the other group(s) are often used in contacts or conflicts with the aim to improve and reinforce one's own culture. Signs of subcultures were visible in Company X and were usually connected to different geographic locations or hierarchical levels *“...blue collar workers here [the unit the informant works in – my comment] only recognise the local culture and work according to that”* (Finnish informant, unit management), and *“...right now the blue collars at our unit do not care so much about the changes, their world is their immediate vicinity”* (French informant, unit management). This connects well with the findings of von Platen (2006) where the organisational identities of the employees; which organisational group they perceived that they belonged to and their roles and status in the organisation, were important factors influencing the employees' ability to make sense of the changes. Kate Laine-Sveiby (1992) in her study of Swedish and Finnish management styles also discovered many examples of misunderstandings between the different parties due to differences in work-related terminology connected to language and culture. At Company X, the feeling of us against them was noticeable, and the notions, especially in middle management, about their own and others' national characters were often typical stereotype images that resulted in and reinforced many of the misunderstandings. This is supported by Lena Zander and Laurence Romani (2004) in their study of leadership preference

and by Garibaldi de Hilal (2006) in her study of the organisational culture of a Brazilian company who argue that the influence of national culture on organisational culture is significant. Within Company X, disagreements remained because employees belonging to the different company cultures, nationalities, and hierarchy levels often assumed that they interpreted things similarly when, in fact, the opposite was true.

### **7.5 Summary of the interview study**

The existence of organisational culture(s) influences the outcome of all organisational change processes. Balogun (2001) emphasises the importance of mapping the organisational culture before starting a change process because understanding change is connected to an organisation's culture. If following Balogun's (2001) advice to map the organisational culture when introducing change, the question that one can ask is what kind of situation Company X faced at the start of the CC-project. The results from the interviews show that the employees of Company X did not view the company as being a unified company, with the exception of the relatively small group of the top-hundred managers in the company. The answers provided by the informants, however, indicated that most of them viewed a unified company as a possibility and that in the future Company X would share a common vision and common values. According to the informants at the time of the interview, the appearance of a diversified company experiencing ambiguity was due to existing cultural differences.



## **8 Substudy three - the questionnaire**

When introducing and working with a change process, it is important for change agents to make sense of the change communication and to fill the communication with meaning. If managers acting as change agents do not succeed in their communication and merely act as transmitters of information, employees will have difficulties connecting abstract definitions such as vision and values with their day-to-day reality (Simonsson, 2002; Johansson, 2003; von Platen, 2006). This substudy is carried out two years after the finalisation of the CC-project in Company X and focuses on the employees' understanding of the cultural change process and their view of the effects of the change communication methods that were used. Few studies concerning cultural change processes with a longitudinal perspective are found in the literature (Lofqvist, 2011) and this adds to the relevance of this study.

In this chapter, the employees represents agency. The structure within which the agency moves in this substudy is the employees' perceptions and conventions. I will describe and analyse how the processes and events (which are present in the actual domain) generated during the introduction phase have affected the employees and how the employees experienced and observed them (which occurs in the empirical domain). The result discussed and analysed in this substudy is the employees social and the material practices. The social practices in this case refer to social relations between management (both top and middle) and employees, and material practices are, for example, resources allocated to agency or rules of behaviour and regulations created in the process of introducing the CC-project.

### **8.1 Are the proposed common vision and values part of day-to-day reality?**

As mentioned in Chapter 7, during the introduction phase the top management of Company X already had an embryo of shared common vision and values at their level. After the finalisation of the CC-project, it was, therefore, top management's intention that the work to make sense of the proposed vision and values should continue at the unit level (for instance, business areas, production units, and sales units). Economic resources specifically targeted for the maintenance of the vision and values, however, were not allocated to the units. The work of living according to the proposed values among the employees did not progress as anticipated by top management and, as a result, a project leader working with the post CC-project was appointed at the HQ level. The support from the CC-project leader was intended to help with creating post-CC communication material,

coordinating activities between units, and spreading ideas on how to work in the post-CC period.

The questionnaire showed three different views on how the change process was proceeding as well as on the idea of a unified company and a company with shared common vision and values. The three views were the following:

1. Positive to both the change process and to the idea of a unified company.
2. Mixed feelings. A low interest in working with the change process but slightly positive toward the idea of a unified company.
3. Negative to the change process itself and consider it to be a problem. Low expectations of what the idea of a unified company could accomplish.

None of the informants considered the introduced common values to be part of day-to-day reality, but about one third of the informants considered the discussion around the proposed vision and values to be alive and looked upon positively. An informant working in communications at the unit level even praised their effort in working in the post-CC period and said, *“our department feels that within our own department we fulfil the CC-project requirements really well”* (Finnish informant). The hopes of what a unified company could accomplish was given by an HR manager at the unit level who said, *“the general attitude is quite good and the employees have high expectations on the process”* (German informant). There was no specific pattern among the units with a positive view on the change process apart from a slight overrepresentation of smaller units.

A slightly larger proportion of the informants had mixed feelings about the change process and what a unified company could achieve. One CC facilitator exemplified this by saying, *“generally people like the idea. Everybody thinks that the process should be continuing. There are only some comments that the idea is nice but the life is life”* (Polish informant). The work toward an understanding of the idea of a unified company among employees needed, according to some informants, more active work among all employees and a willingness to commit to the proposed common values. This was stated by one of the CC facilitators who said, *“to start living in accordance with the values is about changing attitudes and to get there I think we need activities from beneath”* (Swedish informant). The change in attitude mentioned by the CC facilitator in the quotation above could be seen to mean that work was needed along with a grassroots approach to successfully change from old corporate cultures and national cultures toward a unified company with shared

common vision and values (compare with Foss & Foss, 2011). Another informant connected the positive view on the vision and values with the suspicion that not all employees lived according to them. This meant that there was a lack of trust in regard to top management's dedication, as stated by a German HR manager at the unit level who said, *"the content of the values is appreciated by everybody, but everybody look now how the values are lived by the management"*.

The last group of informants felt that the most challenging task in the continuing change process was how to make the values come alive in the organisation. There was a need to make them concrete and not just empty words as expressed by a CC facilitator who said, *"real life and not just words on a piece of A4"* (Finnish informant), and by an HR manager at the unit level who said, *"the most challenging will be to keep them [the values – my comment] alive"* (German informant). These employees did not see the value of adopting and sharing the proposed common vision and values because they did not see the importance of them. This was stated by an HR manager at the unit level who said, *"the education was good, but the introduction is difficult because the people don't really understand why it is important"* (Hungarian informant). The abstract manner in which the values were described was noted among the employees *"employees are not interested. Most people think it [the values – my comment] is just empty words"* (Finnish informant – Internal communication – unit level). The employees doubted the meaning of the values and that the values were treated and viewed the same way throughout the company. This belief was also expounded upon by some of the informants who said that employees suspected that the content and meaning of the proposed common values were treated differently depending on hierarchy level *"blue-collar workers suspect the values are not the same for all"* (Finnish informant - HR). The difficulties of getting the employees and unit management to participate in the process, as well as keeping their attention on the continuing effort of working with the values, was mentioned by some informants. These were mostly CC facilitators and those working in internal communication departments *"in our units we have not found a good way yet to bring the values alive. Managers have to talk about values at department meetings but I am not sure they do that and/or know how to do that"* (Finnish informant).

The few signs of activity and communication from top management concerning the post CC-project were highlighted by informants in all three informant groups. This was mentioned by an HR manager at the unit level who said, *"at corporate level there appears to be no tangible activity in this process"* (Dutch informant). Many of the informants emphasized that the way top management acted was seen by the rest of the employees *"senior*

*management's understanding of the results of their actions [behaviour – my comment] as perceived by the rest of the organisation. This is particularly relevant during re-organisations since the result often end in turf-wars and political intrigue” (Dutch informant – HR). Some informants doubted that the vision and values were lived at all among top management, as one CC-facilitator put it, “trying to convince people that Company X management really intend to live up to values, yet they are constantly showing that the values have no meaning to the management” (Swedish informant). One could claim, just like Beusch (2007), that the employees’ way of avoiding making sense of the vision and values and living according to them was to blame the management for not doing it either. This suggests that if the managers do not care about the values, then why should the employees care “if not the top management lives according to the values, the ambition level among the employees will not be that very high either” (Swedish informant – internal communicator – unit level). In the end, many of the informants emphasised the need for a visible management and for them to lead the way in order for the rest of the organisation to live in accordance with the vision and values. This was emphasized by a Finnish HR manager at the unit level who said, “management should show good examples in daily behaviour. ‘Walk the Talk’”.*

## **8.2 More work needed in many areas**

In post-CC work in Company X, six areas of attention and extra need concerning resources were mentioned by the informants. These were the following: 1) the need of coaching from HQ and unit management, 2) the need of communication aid from HQ and unit management, 3) an understanding of better cooperation between the units, 4) improved coordination from HQ, 5) a better cultural awareness among all employees, and 6) commitment from top management.

The informants considered the lack of resources (both in terms of time and money) and the lack of continuous coaching about vision and values, from HQ in particular, to be a problem in the process. This was described by an informant working in internal communications at the unit level who said, “we lack time and, no offence, coaching capacity in middle management (to inspire people and get them involved), so it’s still a thing from board and perhaps the human resource department. Getting the people involved while there are so many other things that have to be discussed” (Dutch informant). The informants also expressed a need for practical ideas on how to live the values and to keep the process alive without interfering too much with the other tasks at hand in the organisation. According to one CC facilitator, “it would be good to find ways of keeping the process alive but not making it a burden” (Finnish informant). Considering that the aim with the CC-project was that the proposed common

vision and values were supposed to be a part of day-to-day life, it is noteworthy that two years later the informants still viewed the culture change process as an extra added task on top of their normal chores.

In order for the informants to continue the work with the post-CC process, help with continuing communication from management at all levels was asked for. The informants also wished for employee communication material discussing the proposed common vision and values. Employee communication at Company X was considered by some informants to be a problem and if not employed continuously the result was low interest among employees for projects coming from HQ. This was expressed by an HR manager at the unit level who said, *“all our employees were enthusiastic about the vision and values, but last year, when the IBM deal was done, [a project to centralise the different intranets in the company – my comment] the motivation in our production unit was gone. From our point of view the biggest problem in this case was the lack of continuous communication to all our employees. It’s very important for a better understanding in the future to communicate every change process continuously”* (German informant). The informants also asked for material that further described the intention of the values and that provided advice as to how they could more practically act according to the values. This was commented on by two CC facilitators who said, *“the program started very much guided by Company X but in the continuing phase I wanted more tools and help”* (International informant), and *“no practical guidelines how to continue”* (International informant). This problem was acknowledged by Company X’s different communication departments (both corporate and local units), and the willingness to do something was visible *“everyone needs to be reminded of the values every now and then, with small activities, articles, posters, give-aways, etc. Most importantly, managers must talk about the values at departmental meetings for example. All management training should include parts about the vision and values”* (Swedish informant). Employees in the corporate communications department also reflected on their role in the organisation and the continuous work toward a shared view on vision and values. They emphasised that they had to contribute more to the work done at unit levels *“we need to tell for example to businesses [unit levels – my comment] what corporate functions are doing and how we can help businesses. More talking and common happenings needed. Not just at top management level, but also at concrete action level”* (Finnish informant).

In the facilitator guide (42), it was stated that *“thinking across organisational boundaries, sharing ideas, is encouraged and open communication promoted”*. Two years after the introduction of the CC-project, however, many of the informants expressed disappointment in how thinking across the boundaries was lived up to, and the need for cooperation and coordination among the

units was heavily emphasised. The informants expressed that the value ‘we have no barriers’, which was the value most stressing the issue of cooperation, was the most difficult value to live up to. According to an HR manager at the unit level, *“cooperation across the units and respective divisions is magically poor. Are we really all working for the same target in the same company? Day by day, minute by minute, communication barriers are making our life miserable and business progress smaller”* (Polish informant). There seemed to be no difference in the view on the need for cooperation among any of the informants in the company. Such cooperation was asked for from all different types of units, as mentioned by another HR manager who said, *“we still need to develop communication between sales offices and production units or business areas, and to avoid “competition” as we all have the same target”* (French informant).

The need for coordination in the company was mostly mentioned by the HR informants from the production units and quite often was connected to all projects that started at HQ level. *“Too many initiatives coming from Company X headquarters with too short deadlines and no feedback afterwards”* (Belgian informant) or, *“at corporate level, too many initiatives are started at once”* (English informant). It was felt that too many company projects were started and that they were pushed onto the organisation all at the same time. For the informants, especially those at unit levels, this unwillingness at HQ level to coordinate the projects and distribute them over time created a feeling of disbelief regarding the importance of a unified company and, subsequently, a lack of continuing work in the change process among the employees. This was described by a CC facilitator who said, *“not too many requests at the same time (impossible to lead many demands at one time). The respect of the work of everyone already surcharged”* (Belgian informant) and an HR manager at the unit level who said, *“the mills get swamped with a lot of projects, especially in the HR-area”* (German informant).

The view among the informants on the culture(s) in Company X and the connection between a unified company and organisational culture was confusing and not visible. The informants mentioned that the aim of introducing a common organisational culture in Company X was not brought up when discussing the post-CC process, in their view the CC-project was about introducing common vision and values. When informants mentioned problems in the organisation, they mostly discussed differences in nationalities, geographic locations, and hierarchy and very seldom differences in organisational culture. In spite of the lack of discussions among Company X’s top management about cultural differences, the need for cultural awareness was mentioned by HR managers and informants from the sales organisation. Stereotyping was common in the organisation and the

informants pointed out that the lack of cultural knowledge and mistakes made in information and communication could create difficulties in the cooperation between the different units. Some informants, therefore, made a connection between the lack of knowledge about other cultures and the stereotyping that occurred. One informant from corporate communications even mentioned the need of cultural awareness as vital so as to avoid misunderstandings. *“The cooperation between HQ and the business units and between business areas and business units needs to become better. The cultural awareness also needs to become better. I think we need to learn from each other’s differences (from a good perspective) and in that way become more efficient and best!”* (Swedish informant). The fact that the company did not communicate in all languages also caused some trouble in understanding because not all Company X employees were fluent in English. This was commented on by a German HR manager who said, *“the communication, even for important decisions is transported through intranet. This does not fit the ideal of the workers for the mill in our unit. The information and communication is done mostly in English and therefore is not often perceived”*.

Finally, the informants mentioned the need of proof that the proposed common vision and values were lived at the top management level and that there needed to be greater top management visibility and commitment in order for Company X employees to actively work toward a unified company. *“Company X management should live the vision and values. At the moment there is no feeling that they are the creators of these values”* (German informant – CC facilitator). The suspicion that the CC-project was just another change project was also expressed by an informant working in internal communications at the unit level *“since this is not the first project of the so called “soft issue” and the former has not shown any differences, so why should this one work?”* (Swedish informant). thereby taking a wait-and-see attitude.

### **8.3 The culture(s) of Company X two years later**

Two years after the finalisation of the CC-project, the change process was experienced among the employees as far from finished. In order to live according to the values, employees asked for a higher degree of communication that was connected to both coordination and cooperation. One CC facilitator at the unit level connected the lack of communication to a lack of motivation among the employees to *“live the vision and values also in decision communication, organisation changes and so on. Only to say it’s decided is not enough”* (German informant – CC-facilitator). The informants asked for better coordination between different projects started in the company, for better cooperation between different units in the company, and for a higher degree of cultural awareness, such as knowledge about how differences in

nationalities, professions, and company cultures can cause problems *“language and meaning plus local company cultures that already exist, cause problems. General scepticism about the process is visible as well”* (English informant – Internal communications – unit level). When employees feel that they are not involved in the change process or when the communication from management is poor, the result of a change process is seldom successful (Simonsson, 2002; von Platen, 2006).

Findings in previous research imply that documents discussing vision, values, and strategies quite often are used only for educational purposes and are not perceived as living documents among employees and management (Clampitt et al, 2000; Johansson, 2003; von Platen, 2006). This was mentioned by the informants of Company X as well, and their comments two years later were that the most challenging part of the process of making sense of the proposed values was to make them come alive in a concrete way. This was noted by an English CC facilitator who said, *“we concentrate on the values [in their internal work with the post CC-project – my comment]. This is a difficult process to bring ‘alive’ in the company”*. This was also expressed by another CC facilitator, who said that *“the most challenging thing has been to make them [the values – my comment] concrete to everyone and to show that they are a part of the normal life / actions both inside the company and at home. It is still a challenge”* (Finnish informant). This problem of connecting the values to day-to-day reality could be found in the answers from the interviews as well and reinforces the findings in Chapter 6 about empty rhetoric in the written material linked to the CC-project.

Another important issue brought up in the questionnaire was how to get management and employees to participate and become active and to use change communication practices that relate to the employees’ reality so employees can grasp the information and communication given. Clampitt et al (2000) and Heide (2002) refer to studies that show that the best way to create an understanding of abstract information such as vision and values is management walking around and talking to employees or through dialogue. The biggest problems in this change process for the informants have been the lack of support, especially from corporate functions such as communications and from management at all levels, and a lack of resources connected to the change process. This was expressed by a CC facilitator who said, *“due to strong structural changes and as we were faced with demanding objectives on sales side, management [unit management – my comment] did not see possibility to reserve resources in the CC-area. Projects, ideas etc. could not be realized”* (German informant). The informants also needed and asked for a stronger confirmation that the values were being lived throughout the company and especially a commitment among top management *“top level*



*example is missing in all levels (These all apply to both company and local level)”*  
(Spanish informant – CC facilitator).

Top management often formulates visions and values and, therefore, they usually have a more developed conception of the values compared with the employees (Johansson, 2003; Agerholm Andersen, 2010). According to Johansson (2003), von Platen (2006), and Agerholm Andersen (2010), management and employees interpret messages differently and fill them with different meanings depending on their background knowledge and attitudes. In Company X, the difference in how the CC-project and the realisation of the same were interpreted by top management and the rest of the organisation was notable. The meanings of common values for a company (such as Company X) aiming at a unified company are probably quite differently interpreted by management (who defined them, thus implicating that their values should represent the whole organisation) and by employees (who are informed about them). However, in the case of Company X, the employees were to a great extent involved in the process of creating the values but the road toward a unified Company X was still far from realised. This was stated by an informant from internal communication at the unit level who said, *“in Company X communication (Internal Magazine) I see the subject return all the time. By reading about values several times it feels like it is a vivid subject. Although I can’t reproduce a lot of the content. In my perception it’s still the first stage of the process: awareness. You need that before you can work with it”* (Dutch informant).

#### **8.4 Summary of the questionnaire study**

In summary, it can be concluded that the informants believed that a higher level of communication was needed if they were to live according to the values. The informants also asked for better coordination between different projects that were started within the company and for better cooperation between different units in the company. They also wished for a higher degree of cultural awareness in the whole organisation. The most challenging part of the post-CC process was to make sense of the proposed values and to present the proposed values in a concrete way. One of the biggest problems in the post-CC process, according to the informants, was the perceived lack of support from HQ and top and middle managers. The notion among top management that the CC-project would move the company from a cluster of old corporate cultures toward a unified Company X was far from fulfilled two years after the finalisation of the CC-project. Instead the employees of Company X consisted of groups with views ranging from considering the unified Company X a done deal to groups where the proposed common

vision and values were considered of no interest and not even worth working with.

## 9 Concluding discussions

In the introduction to this study, I claimed that M&A is a central issue for most businesses and that the underlying reasons could vary from a need to pursue synergistic effects to a need to enter new geographical markets. I also argued that when the M&A is completed the so called post-M&A period begins and some kind of change process involving integration and reorganisation starts (Johansson & Heide, 2008). These change processes are often rather complicated and failures are common. It is often highlighted in previous research that these failures manifest themselves in different attitudes and behaviour among employees (Zorn et al, 2000; Balogun, 2001; Russ, 2008). Previous studies also show that a central part of the change process involves a change in the organisational culture. Many managers and practitioners claim that when introducing organisational change an organisation should aim for a unified company with shared vision and values. Nonetheless, a significant problem with international company acquisitions is the difficulty in making several different independent organisations work as a united company (Weber, 1996; Alvesson & Deetz, 2000). Change communication has been shown to be one of the most central aspects of a change process both from a theoretical and managerial perspective (Lewis, 2001; Johansson & Heide, 2008). Because an organisational change process mostly entails changes in the organisational culture, and communication is the way a culture manifests itself, an organisational change is dependent on functioning communication. Based on this background, the question that this thesis sought to answer was how change communication practices are used in culture change processes and especially in post-M&A culture change processes. To answer this question, I have studied a company called Company X that initiated a project called the Corporate Culture (CC) project that aimed to unify the company after it had undergone several major M&As during the end of the 1990s.

In this study, it has been argued that change communication in a culture change process involves the need to consider both the role of culture and change communication methods, such as strategic communication, rhetoric, and activities, in order to understand an organisational change process. In this final chapter, therefore, I intend to further discuss the findings in Chapters 6, 7, and 8 in relation to the following three theory-driven aspects of understanding culture change processes and change communication practices aligned with the purpose of this study and deduced from theory: (A) *the role of culture*, (B) *top management's use of change communication methods*, and (C) *employee perception and understanding of change processes* in the culture change process.

## 9.1 The role of culture

Culture played an important role in the CC-project and affected the outcome of the change process. It was, however, never defined, discussed, or reflected on within the project. When mentioned, it was connected to, and seen as creating, problems. The aim of the CC-project, in the eyes of the top management, was to create a unified company with shared common vision and values. The word organisational culture as such, or any other cultural belonging, was seldom used in the change communication rhetoric. Even so, in the views of middle managers and employees cultural differences were an issue affecting Company X both before and during the CC-project. Cultural differences were thought of, especially among middle managers, as being connected to nationality, geographic location, and hierarchy levels and their view on culture was connected to the others. This view included everything that was perceived as being different from their own reality.

The rhetoric used in the CC-project discussed the future situation when the proposed common vision and values were going to be shared at length but seldom discussed the present situation and what the shared vision and values really meant or how they could be accomplished. The focus in the rhetoric was on discussing the six core business ideas and their importance for the future of Company X, but the vision was never mentioned and the values were only mentioned at the beginning of the CC-project. How the proposed common values, in practice, would create a unified company was not discussed either, it was just assumed that they would. The unclear reason for why shared common vision and values were needed created multiple interpretations of what they actually meant among employees at Company X, something Alvesson (2001;a) called 'ambiguity of knowledge'. Pepper and Larson (2006:52) argue that an uncertain reality creates a need among employees to choose a cultural belonging and identity. The employees' choice of belonging will, therefore, be affected by how they manage corporate rhetoric, individual preferences, and organisational values.

Because the aim of the CC-project was to create a unified company, most of the company's efforts and resources were on introducing a common vision and common values. The existing cultures were neither considered nor discussed because they were, in the eyes of top management, about to be removed and changed into a new and shared common culture. Cultural differences, though, are so much more than the organisational cultures belonging to the acquired companies, as top management referred to in the internal bulletin. Cultural differences can be connected, for example, to national differences, differences in units, and differences in professions and genders (Parker, 2000; Martin 2002). However, in Company X, an us-

against-them situation was found in the different units and in the communication among employees at the middle management level. Stereotyping based on national and geographical differences was common and created misunderstandings, but these misunderstandings were not considered or worked with in the CC-project. The consequences Company X faced when not acknowledging the role of culture in the change process was described by the informants as creating problems in daily work. These problems included misunderstandings due to language differences and misinterpretations of meanings based on cultural differences such as existing subculture groups. These results add to previous findings such as those of Kavooosi (2005) who showed how the lack of understanding of cultural differences in the change process in post-M&A situations can cause serious problems in the companies trying to introduce culture change processes. According to Kavooosi (2005), awareness of and working with cultural differences in the organisation is important if the organisation wishes to succeed while the lack of awareness or acknowledgement of cultural differences could possibly result in the failure of the change process.

As I have argued above, culture plays an important role in change processes when it comes to acknowledging the culture(s) of the organisation in the start-up phase of the change process as well as in the way that different cultures affect the change process itself. If change agent(s), such as the top management in the case of Company X, aim for a unified company with a future-oriented approach and with a tool view on change communication, it is quite likely that cultural differences will be overlooked. If the differences resulting in misunderstandings are not acknowledged, discussed, and processed, they will probably remain and influence not only the outcome of the change process but other processes in the organisation as well. My point of departure in this study is a multicultural view on organisations and that the multidimensional nature of an organisational culture can influence any outcome of a change process if not acknowledged, discussed, and processed. In my reasoning, it is important in a culture change process to consider the past and to carry out a cultural analysis at the beginning of the process in order to reach a positive result. It is also important throughout the entire change process to constantly add in aspects of cultural dynamics that might facilitate the change process (Parker, 2000; Latta, 2009).

## **9.2 Top management's use of change communication methods**

The main change communication methods used in Company X were providing information through company communication channels, communication at department meetings, the use of internal change agents, and introduction seminars aimed at employees. Most of the communication

around and about the proposed common vision and values in the change process was given via the company's communication channels such as the company magazine and intranet. The proposed common values and their meaning for Company X and the specific departments were, according to the CC-project communication plan, to be discussed at department meetings, but that was seldom done. When it was done, managers did not really know how to communicate the message of why a unified company and shared common vision and values were needed. Company X appointed, apart from top management, a second type of change agent, facilitators, with the intention of having them acting as spokespersons for the idea of a unified company. Company X's appointment of facilitators supports Morténus et al (2012) discovery that using change communication agents acting as spokespersons for new ideas resulted in easier acceptance among employees for changing work practices. With the exceptions of the main CC facilitator at each unit, most of the facilitators did not work as much with the introduction of the vision and values apart from during the introduction seminars. These main CC facilitators, though, were not given the conditions needed for being able to make a change in the change process. One such condition, according to Balogun (2005), is how priorities are made at the management level in regard to how resources are distributed in terms of money and human resources.

Another condition, according to Balogun (2005), is the possibility of local autonomy in how to execute the process. In Company X, the CC-project was run from the top with the Consultant Firm communication plan as the guiding star. One of the most common comments in the post CC-project dealt with the behaviour of the most important change agents, top management, and how their perceived low level of commitment and visibility made the informants doubt their dedication towards the proposed common values. The informants accused top management of not living according to the values. Why that comment was so common is, however, difficult to answer in my study. According to Beusch (2007:232/261), creating a "*constructed*" reality where the organisation members' own opinions are represented, a so called 'personal topoi', results in the members continuing to do what they have done in the past without having to change. By accusing management of not living according to the values, the employees themselves did not feel obligated to change. The importance of top management behaviour is also well in line with the constructed potentiality paradigm of Foss and Foss (2011) that emphasizes the view of changing oneself before changing others and links the behaviour of top management to the results of the change process.

In the CC-project communication, Company X used only a few arguments that were repeated over and over again in the different communication channels to explain the proposed common vision and values. The arguments did not, however, explain what the values signified and why a unified company was to be preferred compared with the already existing cultures in Company X. The informants also said that the arguments used in the CC-project were abstract and not connected to their day-to-day lives and that they had difficulties incorporating the proposed common values into their working lives. In addition, the majority of employees at Company X were culturally, nationally, and socioeconomically heterogeneous meaning that the message given by top management most likely was interpreted in many different ways by the employees. Employees and managers did not interpret the outcome of the change process homogeneously either. This reinforces the findings of Risberg (1999, 2001) who found connections, especially in M&As, between the employees' backgrounds, present situations, and positions. She also found other factors, such as the illusion of familiarity when acquiring companies within the same branch and how employees had multiple interpretations of the objectives of the change process, the presented corporate identity, etc. Risberg (2001:78) called this 'ambiguity of purpose'.

I believe that the need for functioning change communication practices is independent of the organisation's aim for a unified company or a multicultural approach. I agree with Renberg (2007) that while the use of a few but carefully chosen arguments is a useful rhetorical method to reach recognition, the arguments nevertheless need a core of substance if they are to be accepted. In the case of Company X, the arguments connected to the values were abstract, few in number, and had little to do with employees' day-to-day reality. On top of that, the company put emphasis in its communication on the core business ideas rather than the proposed common values and what they represented.

In my view, organisational change processes are dynamic and are dependent on a participatory approach. I argue, based on the results of my study, that to successfully realise the intention of a change process and to be able to communicate the aim, those responsible for the change process, such as top management in the case of Company X, would need to do a lot more than just choosing suitable arguments and informing about them. For instance, they need to work with participatory communication (Russ, 2008), facilitate involvement from employees in the decision process, and acknowledge how their behaviour is viewed by the employees. This is even more important when dealing with change communication in cross-cultural settings. This demands knowledge about ambiguity of communication, how cultural differences (such as national, organisational, and professional differences)

affect interpretation of messages based on views on issues such as management style, power distribution, and how language differences affect the understanding of messages (Risberg, 1999). Furthermore I believe, just like Kezar (2001), that functioning change communication practices need to take the past into account before starting to communicate what to change in order for the members of the organisation to understand the change process. Working with change agents is a viable option and well in line with Russ' (2008) participatory approach if the change agents are given the conditions needed to play an active role in the change process. Just to act as spokespersons, as in the case of Company X, with no resources and power to act, does not reinforce the aim of the change process.

### **9.3 Employee perception and understanding of change processes**

During the CC-project, the Company X employees perceived and understood the change process differently. These differences ranged from positive perception and understanding of the change process to neutral perception and with a focus on their own workplace to low understanding of the need of the change process. This is referred to as multiple interpretations among employees by Risberg (2001). These results reinforce other studies showing how employees, depending on their background, personal situation, organisational belonging, and position in the company view a change process differently (see for example Risberg, 1999, 2001; Lewis, 2000; von Platen, 2006).

In the case of Company X, the employees accepted the top-down approach to the change communication, and when the post CC-project started and the work with the values was transferred to the units, the response from facilitators and middle managers was to ask for more help from top management and for more signs of commitment. The appointment of 150 facilitators as change agents, which was a way for Company X to involve more employees in the change process, did not change the top-down approach in CC-project communication because the CC facilitators merely acted as spokespersons and not as change process participants. With the top-down and programmatic approach that top management used in the change communication, these multiple interpretations among employees were not understood by top management and this resulted in misunderstandings arising at the middle management level due to cultural differences within the company. Two years after the finalisation of the CC-project, multiple interpretations still remained and the understanding about the change process among employees showed signs of ambiguity. Most of the employees considered common values as something positive while at the same time



they viewed the change process with some suspicion because they did not understand the reasons for a change.

When top management considered the CC-project finished and that the proposed common vision and values had been introduced, they handed over the work with the values to the units. The low knowledge among top management of the employees' multiple understandings of the change process probably also contributed to the positive view of the change process among top management, especially because they already shared an embryo of a unified culture from the beginning of the CC-project. Employees, however, were waiting for communication and visible actions from top management showing that they lived according to the values and were committed to them before acting themselves. This connects well with the findings by Armenakis and Harris (2009) who concluded that to motivate employees to commit to change they need to know why, if there is a good reason, and if the change process is considered efficient and is committed to by top management.

The informants mentioned that when working with the proposed common values they were in need of coaching and communication aid from HQ and unit management. Informants also asked for an understanding from top management of better cooperation between the units and improved coordination from HQ as well as a better cultural awareness among all employees. The need of coaching and communication aid resonates with Risberg's (2001) finding of the importance of constant communication that is rhetorically created with substance and that is altered according to cultural differences. The need for better cooperation between units and improved coordination from HQ connects with the findings of Pepper and Larson (2006) in which tension among employees in a post-merger organisation resulted in change process failures if they were not dealt with. Pepper and Larson (2006) clustered these areas of tension as collaboration or competition among and between new co-workers, assimilation or autonomy with regard to vision and values, and consensus and command referring to differences in decision-making style. The first cluster, tension created when collaboration or competition among or between new co-workers occurs, relates to the needs of cooperation and in some way also with coordination desired by employees at Company X. The need for cultural awareness in Company X has a lot to do with the subject raised in Chapter 9.1, the role of culture, because middle management in particular worked in an environment where cultural differences affected their work negatively but this issue was not addressed.

Based on the results of this study, it can be argued that change processes are extremely dependent on the employees' perception and understanding of the need for a change and their commitment to change. If these two factors are not handled properly, the risk for change process failure is great. Depending on the employees' views on change, they will communicate positive or negative messages to other employees as well as to other people and stakeholders outside the organisation and thereby contribute to commitment or resistance. The constructed potentiality (Foss & Foss, 2011) and its focus on the importance of changing oneself before attempting to change others is of vital importance in the change process. This especially highlights the need to be aware of one's own behaviour and how others are evaluating it. I also support Hatch (2004) who argued that leaders have the potential to affect organisational culture(s) if they are aware of such culture(s) and act accordingly. Members of the organisation, however, decide to what extent that potential is realised due to their view on the change process as well as their level of commitment.

### **9.5 Towards commitment or resistance**

In this final chapter I will return to the purpose of this study, which was to describe and analyse both the top management's use and the employees' perception and understanding of change communication practices in a culture change process during a major M&A. Moreover, I will reflect upon the fulfilment of the purpose of the study in relation to the adopted ontological framework of critical realism (see Aastrup, 2000), and I will discuss the insights that have been gained by this study. In Aastrup's network model (2000), human agency implies the power to choose to act or not, and depending on its position in the organisation human agency has different powers and abilities to create action and human practice. Human practice is then reproduced or transformed according to the action of human agency. Agency has in this study, been represented by employees and top and middle management. The results presented in this thesis are directly related to the empirical domain that is observed and experienced by human agency. But how are the human agencies' actions and human practices reproduced or transformed in an organisation? As previously argued, this relates to the perceptions human agencies have and how agency chooses to act upon their perceptions. As illustrated in the empirical chapters, the perception regarding the culture change process among agency, on a company level, ranges from a rather unifying view among top management to the multiple interpretations among employees that cause ambiguity of purpose, communication, and knowledge.

Top management's comprehension of cultural change was to produce common vision and values and then implementing them, which they considered being the main tool to culturally change Company X. Their perception of change communication practices was reflected in their tool view approach of change communication, the top-down communication, and their action was thus linked to the programmatic approach with a focus on persuasion. Their understanding of the employees' ambiguity of purpose and communication was low and they neglected to take the different needs employees might have had regarding issues such as cultural differences into consideration. Top management's actions, therefore, contributed to reproducing the structures rather than transforming them into new ones.

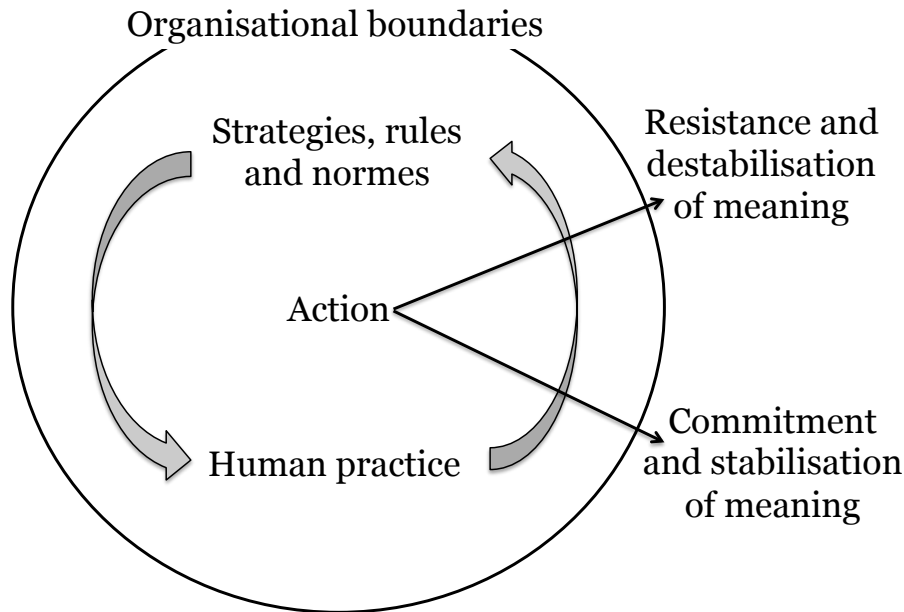
The employees' perception of the cultural change process was unclear and filled with multiple interpretations that contributed to a variety of actions. These actions all depended on how certain or uncertain they viewed their day-to-day reality to be and how they felt about the culture change process, and this resulted in either commitment or resistance toward change. Employees' perception of change communication relates to that of top management, the tool view of change communication, and their actions, therefore, were waiting for top management actions. The employees were passively receiving information and asking for help from HQ rather than getting personally involved in the change process. Employees' actions contributed to reproduction and reinforcement of prevailing structures at Company X rather than transforming them into new ones. The question, then, is what implications the insights discussed above have on a more aggregate level based on realistic generalizing and retrodution<sup>1</sup>. Because change by default is connected to transformation rather than reproduction, it is of relevance to discuss how transformation can be achieved in an organisation.

Linking the insights from this study to Aastrup's (2000) view that social structure manifests itself only in and through human agency, I believe that organisational culture(s) are linked, reproduced, and transformed through all members of an organisation. Also adhering to Hall's (1959:186) statement that "*culture is communication and communication is culture*", the factors of culture, communication, and members of an organisation are to be considered as key elements in the change process. This in turn relates to the understanding that culture is something an organisation *is* and not something an organisation *has* and that organisations are held together by

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<sup>1</sup> Realistic generalizing is used in critical realism and focuses on the causal mechanisms and structures present in the real domain that are involved when a view of a concrete object/event is constructed. It is through abstract thinking and reconstruction of the actual observation (the empirical domain) that one argues for the generalization of *retrodution* (Sayer, 1992).

stabilisations of meaning (Parker, 2000), which is the existence of a common framework of rules of behaviour and norms. Furthermore, considering change as continuous and not static and that action is connected to intentionality and the choices made by agency, in other words, members' choices to commit to or resist to change as illustrated in Figure 6.



*Figure 6. The way towards commitment to or resistance against change in an organisation*

As illustrated in Figure 6, a framework of strategies, rules of behaviour, and norms in an organisation is vital, but only in one dimension, to achieve stabilisation of meaning. To reach stabilisation of meaning in an organisation, the employees need to feel that they belong to the organisation and recognise the organisational boundaries. Also, they need to act accordingly because it is through their everyday practice that the norms and strategies are manifested. Within the organisational boundaries, rules and norms might be regulated through, for example, a code of conduct and organisational strategies concerning change communication methods, for example, which communication channels and methods to use for specific target groups, the type of message to give, when to give the message, and so forth. These rules of behaviour and norms are what are often seen and understood as means to culturally change an organisation and are usually interpreted as common vision and values. When the understanding of the overall change process and especially the actions and human practices

involved among top management of an organisation are limited, the employees' need to understand the change process might be overlooked by top management.

Employees of an organisation can choose to commit to or resist actions aiming at changing an organisation depending on their understanding of the reasons for doing so. Furthermore, if the employees' need for understanding is overlooked, the employees' perception of the change process might lead to a higher degree of resistance. If the employees perceive the change process as uncertain, and depending on how it is integrated into daily practice, corporate rhetoric, and individual preferences, they will choose their cultural belonging and identity based on safety, that which they already know, and this often leads to resistance. Thus actions leading to resistance create destabilisation of meaning in an organisation. The human practice, the social relations between members of an organisation and material determinations such as resource allocation (both the actual values and their implications for behaviour) are as important in an organisation as a framework of strategies, rules of behaviour, and norms, and none of these factors should be overlooked when aiming for a positive outcome of a change process. Depending on which change communication practices are used, an organisation might create commitment and stabilisation of meaning, leading to consistency in the organisation, or create resistance and destabilisation of meaning, leading to inconsistency and, in the long run, an us-against-them feeling in the organisation. Therefore, it can be concluded that change communication practices used in a culture change process need to consider the structure or culture(s) of the organisation that are already in place because the employees in the organisation are a vital part of the structure, and they need to be given the reason for the change through rhetoric connected to the employees' day-to-day reality. In addition, the organization should use change communication methods built on dialogue that include and involve all employees in the change process in order to create commitment to change. However, and this is the central conclusion of this thesis, successful change communication practices in a culture change process are not merely about creating visions and values and the purposeful use of rhetoric, but they are also about understanding and being aware of everyday practices and how people act within the organisational boundaries.

Through my findings, I have contributed a communication perspective to understanding the culture change process because communication is an indispensable ingredient in moving the change process forward. Furthermore, as previously stated, culture and communication are very much interlinked and to understand change communication practices is to understand culture change processes as well. My analysis has also added

some insight into employees' attitudes toward organisational change (see Russ, 2008 and Choi, 2011) and thus added more knowledge concerning the importance of the employees' commitment or resistance to change for the success of any change process. Additionally, I have conducted my analyses based on an extensive amount of empirical material where I have worked with a slightly different perspective. I have reflected more on how the change process is perceived rather than the more normative, top-down perspective that is usually taken when working with change processes. The study took a longitudinal approach, which is lacking in previous research (see Armenakis and Bedeian, 1999, Whelan-Berry and Somerville, 2010 and Lofquist, 2011), thus adding a process view on how culture change processes are perceived, for example, by the organisational members. A longitudinal perspective is also a necessity in understanding the organisational members' level of commitment or resistance to a change process. In addition, it is my hope that my findings constitute a step further towards understanding which change communication methods to use by change agents when taking a process perspective (Johansson & Heide, 2008). This final contribution is to a large extent an empirical contribution and provides a greater understanding of the need for using a variety of methods when getting involved in a change process.

## **9.6 Epilogue**

Seven years later, Company X had sold off or closed down most of the companies it had bought leaving production units only in Sweden, France, and Germany apart from the major production facilities in Finland. The merchant division was sold as well. There were only Finns on the management board, and most of the staff functions had merged with those of the mother- and sister companies and had only Finnish employees. The total number of employees had decreased from 22 000 to 6 100.

## 10 A few words about change communication in practice

In this thesis, I have now spent over 100 pages describing the scientific basis, theories, schools of thought, and methods and presented the results from my study. The question now is how all of this knowledge can be useful in a practical sense.

Although slightly outside of the scope of this thesis, I have decided to add a chapter with some more concrete advice on what to consider before initiating major changes in an organisation. All leaders aiming for change can use these pieces of advice. This text is drawn from both established theory and the results of my study. The results are mostly connected to cultural change, but the advice is applicable for other processes of change as well because most changes affect the culture(s) of an organisation.

Before I get to the core of my advice I would like to describe my point of departure in how I view a change process:

- i. First of all, facilitating change in an organisation is about changing people's perceptions. Anyone who has ever tried to change his or her own behaviour toward a healthier lifestyle, for example, by quitting smoking or spending less time in the office and more time with their children and so on knows how difficult it can be to change such behaviour. The same goes for members of an organisation. If the change brought about is against their will or the members do not understand why to change, they will resist and the change process will most often fail.
- ii. Secondly, I claim that an organisation *cannot* reach a unified culture with a complete set of shared vision and values among employees because the individual members of the organisation come from diverse backgrounds. What the organisation does need, however, is some kind of framework to work within, something for the employees to connect to. Therefore, I will say a few words about something that I call stabilisation of meaning. Stabilisation of meaning refers to common rules of behaviour, a kind of code of conduct, for the employees to relate to. The employees do not necessarily need to agree upon these rules of behaviour, but as long as they are acting within the framework of the organisation they have to adhere to the rules. On top of that, a common set of

strategies of action are needed such as a type of reward system, organisational structures, power structures, and so forth.

- iii. Thirdly, the best way to achieve a positive outcome of a change process is when the change initiative and efforts come from below, from a grassroots perspective. Such a process, however, is rarely possible especially in global corporate organisations with thousands of employees. The lesson to learn, though, is that the more the members of the organisation are part of the change process from the start, the greater the possibility of succeeding with the change process, and the higher share of members participating actively in the change process the greater the possibility of success.

So what is required to get the members of the organisation to commit to change, from the top management down to last employed person? In my view the following factors need to be taken into account:

1. Change is a process, not a project
2. Map the culture(s) of the organisation
3. Establish stabilisation of meaning
4. Clarify why to change and then plan, involve, and discuss
5. A diversified communication strategy is needed
6. Talk WITH the employees, not TO them, and talk a lot
7. Commitment from change leaders (normally top management) is needed to create credibility for the change process
8. Maintenance is an essential part of the change process

#### **1. *Change is a process, not a project***

Many organisations make the mistake of planning a change process as a project and usually allocate far too short of a time frame. Because change is about changing people, an organisation has to take into account the time it takes to change the perception, attitudes, and behaviours of its members. Change is a process that demands individual understanding and commitment, and is not just something you do because you are told to. A process view on change also acknowledges that change takes time and that



activities planned within the framework of the change process are many, diversified, and spread out over time.

*Advice:* View change as an on-going process, which means an understanding of the time it takes to change and also a commitment to change from the change leaders over a long period of time.

## **2. *Map the culture(s) of the organisation***

Map the culture(s) of the organisation before initiating a major change process. As a change leader, you need to know what kind of organisational culture(s) you have before you can change it/them into something else, something new. Issues in the organisation, such as misunderstanding between employees and management, conflicts, personal power struggles, etc. will remain even if you rename the managers' title, create new organisation schemes, or redesign the logo. Mapping the culture(s) is also important because some of the existing perceptions among employees may be valuable to keep, while some are in need of a change. Before committing to change, however, the members of the organisation need to know *why* to change, and that means that change leaders need to fully understand why the change is necessary and be able to present the reasons for change in a comprehensible manner.

*Advice:* Make a thorough investigation of the organisation's culture(s) before starting up a change process. Be sure to know what to change and why to change before starting up the change process.

## **3. *Establish stabilisation of meaning***

In the case of cultural change, change leaders often formulate new visions and values that they then communicate to the organisation and expect the organisation to accept within a stipulated time frame. This is somewhat problematic. Sharing values is a process that can take many years to accomplish and change leaders in most organisations gravely underestimate the time required. In real terms, they never have that time to spend on a change process. My suggestion is to work with what I call stabilisation of meaning, meaning norms and rules of behaviour that guide the organisation's decisions, procedures, and systems and connect with the favoured behaviours and actions that have been prioritised in the organisation. Rules of behaviour or codes of conduct can be, for example, policies, routines, rewards systems, and employee career paths. The code of conduct is something the members of the organisation have to follow when

acting within the framework of the organisation, but they do not necessarily have to believe in them.

If worked with diligently and consistently over a long period of time, the code of conduct might eventually turn into the organisations values. This is particularly true if it is constantly and efficiently communicated, and if unwanted behaviour is actively and openly discouraged.

*Advice:* Establish stabilisation of meaning in the organisation via a code of conduct. It is vital here that the code of conduct is uniform, well worked through, and thoroughly communicated to the members of the organisation.

#### **4. Clarify why to change and then plan, involve, and discuss**

Now it is time for the next step; to verbalise the reason(s) for change. As mentioned before, the reason(s) should be based on the results from the mapping and the arguments for and against the change should evolve through this mapping. Now is also the time to start involving as many members of the organisation as possible in the change process. If feasible, involve members from all over the organisation and from all hierarchical levels in order to reach a faster acceptance of the intended changes. If they have been given the right conditions during the start-up phase of the change process, the members involved in the change process will effectively act as change ambassadors later on in the process.

At this stage, it is vital to discuss the pros and cons of the change and what will be the effect of the change within the organisation. It should become clear at this point what problems can arise due to the change and what can change leaders do in order to prevent those problems. The preventive actions should be as much a part of the change process as the actions leading to change. Many change leaders make the mistake of focusing only on the change and forget the side effects.

*Advice:* Verbalise the reason for change, involve as many members of the organisation as possible in the change process, list pros and cons of a change, and plan for both change activities and preventive actions.

#### **5. A diversified communication strategy is needed**

People are different and have different needs. This is easy to understand. However, many change leaders forget that the members of the organisation are as diversified as any other group of people, and change communication tends to be rather uniform. To succeed, a diversified approach is the key. Use

all of the communication channels available (meetings, magazines, bulletin boards, etc.) and do not forget to use all different languages represented in the organisation. Repeat the message constantly and remember that repetition is the mother of knowledge. Involve all members of the organisation early in any change communication actions and use the members involved in the start-up phase as ambassadors. One rather common communication strategy is to wait with the change communication until the plan and process is ready. That is a big mistake. Those who are not involved in the start-up phase of the change process know that something is going on and if they do not get any information they tend to invent their own understanding. Remember to communicate the change process already from the outset, even if the message is “we have nothing to report at this moment”. Wild rumours and gossip among the members of the organisation is not the best start in a change process if employee commitment is the goal.

*Advice:* A diversified change communication strategy is needed, so start the change communication immediately, involve all employees in change communication actions, and use the members involved in the start-up phase as ambassadors.

## **6.    *Talk WITH the employees, not TO them, and talk a lot***

After establishing change communication strategies, the next step is to verbalise the arguments and rhetorically create the reasons for change. A commonly made mistake at this stage is to create messages that are too high-flying, too abstract, and have little connection to the members’ day-to-day realities. Because change is about changing perceptions, a more concrete and down-to-earth approach is needed. Again, the answer to why to change is the most important, and whether the reasons are positive or negative do not really matter. What *does* matter is that change leaders and their communication and rhetoric are honest.

The most effective communication is always via face-to-face communication. There is no way around that fact. If time, money, and personal resources are an obstacle, there is a wealth of complementing or alternative means in printed and digital form. A complement to individual dialogue is to discuss the change process at various meetings in the organisation, to use internal as well as external communication channels, and to use change ambassadors. However, one of the most important lessons to learn in the change communication, regardless of communication channel, is to talk *with* the members of the organisation not *to* them. Few, if any, people change because someone tells them to. Most people change when they realise they need to or

see the benefit of the change, so change motives are of paramount importance.

As already mentioned, repetition is vital, and because change takes time the change communication needs a long-term perspective. Change leaders and change ambassadors need to repeatedly communicate, in all change communication channels available, why to change. When decisions are made and communicated, the reason for change should be connected to the decision. If all employees are involved in change communication actions, these actions should also be repeated periodically.

*Advice:* Use face-to-face communication as much as possible, create concrete arguments connected to the day-to-day reality of the members of the organisation, repeat them constantly, include the employees in the change process, and talk *with* them, not *to* them.

**7. *Commitment from change leaders (normally top management) is needed to create credibility for the change process***

After the start-up phase of the change process, when most of the members of the organisation are up and running, it is easy to act according to the reason for change. Change leaders and the rest of the organisation are thus constantly reminded about the change process. Later, when the organisation is supposed to act accordingly without being reminded, it is easy to fall back into old routines. The behaviour of change leaders in particular is viewed and judged by the rest of the organisation because the members, especially if they are not entirely committed to the new ways, may actively look for reasons to avoid change. *“If the change leaders do not change, why should we?”*

This is about change leaders’ credibility as well. If change leaders take a decision regarding a change process, they have to show, not just by words but also with action, that they are behind the change. Just like raising children: They do as parents do, not what the parents tell them to do.

*Advice:* As change leader, be aware of how much your behaviour is viewed and judged. When deciding to run a change process be sure to commit to it, because if you do not commit your organisation will not commit to it either.

## **8.    *Maintenance, an essential part of the change process***

Referring back to my first point of advice, that change is a process, maintenance is a natural part of any change process, and this is valid even when the members are committed to change. The organisation changes, new members enter into the organisation, old routines seem more attractive, counter-productive decisions are taken, and so forth. Many obstacles along the way can occur and if the change process is not kept alive attitudes and behaviour that are already known are easy to return to and often too tempting to resist.

*Advice:* Remember that change is a process and is a process that is on-going and never stops. Therefore, maintenance is vital in any change process. So plan for maintenance actions already in the start-up phase of the change process.

With these proposed pieces of advice, it is my hope that the next change process handled in your organisation will be successful. A successful change process will, in the end, mean a more efficient organisation with less misunderstandings and more focused employees.

Good luck!

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# Appendix

## 1 Interview guide

What is your opinions, experience and knowledge about your own as well as other nationalities within Company X (that you are working with as employee, colleague and super- or subordinate)

Can you describe both the good as well as the less good sides of these nationalities ?

What do you think the other think of the good and less good sides of your nationality ?

Would you please give an example of a tale you find good and valid

What is your departments function in the company ?

Can you recall some of the history of your department (when it was founded etc) ?

What was the basic mission of the group at that time ?

Tell me a little bit about how people were feeling about what was happening – were they anxious, angry, delighted or what ?

What was done and who did things in the group ?

Do you feel that you have achieved your objectives yet ?

With whom (other units) do you cooperate in the company ?

What is it that you deliver or get from them ?

How does the cooperation work ?

Is there something special about them you think is important ?

What do you think the other units view of you are ?

Which kind of job is found more frequently in your organisation ?

Everybody works together and you do not get individual credit.

Everybody is allowed to work individually and individual credit can be received.

What do you think is considered good and bad behaviour in the unit and the company ?

Is there some special occasion, from a cultural point of view, you remember from within the unit and the company ?

What is your function in the company ?

How would you define the hierarchical level/ structure in Company X and your unit ?

High

Medium

Low

For what reason, in your opinion, do we have a hierarchical structure in this company and your unit ?

Do you find it important that your manager and yourself have at hand precise answers to most of the questions you may raise about your work ?

Would you bypass you manager if the question could be answered more efficient without him/ hers direct involvement ?

What do you think he/ her feels about that ?

If your subordinate would do that, how would you feel about it ?

Is it OK for your boss that you in a conversation gives contra order and disagree with him/ her ?

The decision making in your unit – how would you describe that ?

Do you think a study like this is necessary in this company and is there something special concerning this you would like to add ?

Finally – would you like to describe how you perceive Company X of today ?

Externally

Internally

## 2 Questionnaire

Which unit do you represent? :

Which category do you belong to?:    HR managers  
Internal communicators  
Facilitators


1 How do you perceive that the Vision and Values process is kept alive in:

**Your unit:**

Not at all

Some

Quite good

Full speed


**Company X**

Not at all

Some

Quite good

Full speed


Please comment your choice:

- 2 What is the general attitude towards the values in your unit?
- 3 Can you give examples of successful activities which have increased awareness of Company X strategy and living the values at your unit? (If an action plan exist please attach).
- 4 What has been most challenging in introducing the Vision and Values in your unit?
- 5 What do you consider as the biggest problem in the introduction process at your specific unit? What is it that you lack most?
- 6 What do you feel that we need to improve (for example, behaviour,

co-operation, routines etc) when considering the values at:

Company level (for example between HQ and units, or between units, between different businesses etc):

Your unit:

- 7 How easy do you consider your unit has to live according to the different values? Please rank the values from 1 (easy) to 4 (difficult).

**Value**

**Ranking**

“We have no barriers”

“We mean what we say, we do what we say”

“We encourage people to reach their full potential”

“We respect each other”


Any additional comments?

- 8 How would you like the implementation of the values to continue at:

Company level:

Your unit:

- 9 Any other comments?

## Medier och kommunikation

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